A CHILD OF ISRAEL

By Edouard Cadol

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A CHILD OF ISRAEL.

A NOVEL.

BY EDOUARD CADOL.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH
BY LAURA E. KENDALL.

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"A Child of Israel," by Edouard Cadol, is a powerful and deeply interesting romance of the heart. The plot is in the highest degree ingenious and original, while the skill with which it is unfolded is simply astonishing. It hinges on the love of Louise Vaconsin de Bovilliers for Pierre Wavre, a gifted young Jewish artist, who comes to her father's château to paint her portrait, and the close association thus brought about causes friendship to ripen into the tender passion. Louise, however, discovers that Pierre is an Israelite, and is filled with horror. Afterwards, the Count d'Aitignies marries her for her money and renders her miserable. She in vain struggles to be released from her bonds, but the manner in which she ultimately obtains relief, and the part filled in her after life by the manly Jewish artist, should be learned from the book itself, for in this brief notice it is impossible to do justice to Cadol's powerful plot and absorbing narrative. There is a dramatic intensity about the tale, the spell of which cannot be resisted, and the situations are wrought up to the highest point of absorbing interest, while every character is sketched in exceptionally vivid colors. Cadol never wastes a word—he pushes his story straight ahead, without introducing a single incident not required to make matters perfectly clear to the reader; hence there is nothing to break the continuity of the delightful romance, which has been admirably translated by Laura E. Kendall. "A Child of Israel" cannot fail to make a pronounced sensation.

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A CHILD OF ISRAEL.

CHAPTER I.

THE WINNER OF THE PRIZE OF ROME.

TO *Colonel Morseux of the 3d Artillery. Grenoble.*
Trouville, August 26th, 187–.

So your promotion has come at last, my dear Nephtali. The Gazette has just reached us, and behold, you are a Colonel. How proud we are of Frenchmen!

Your wife is dancing about the room for joy; and your two babies who understand nothing at all about it, and who fear she has gone mad, gaze at their uncle in speechless bewilderment from the corner of the sofa, as if asking whether they should laugh or cry.

Whereupon, my too excitable sister bursts into a fit of sobbing which sets all four of us to embracing each other like so many fools, while we mingle our tears together. You can certainly boast, Monsieur Colonel, of having received from my hand, the most affectionate

wife in the universe. Do not neglect to thank me at the first opportunity.

But I scarcely know when that will be; for even if you come with the greatest possible despatch, you will not find me under your roof; a fact which grieves our good Magdalene not a little. But what can you expect, O magnanimous warrior? The pension I receive as the winner of the prize of Rome expires this year, and Trouville is not the place to amass the fortune to which my position of laureate entitles me.

To speak seriously, I am expected at the château of a rich connoisseur in Picardy, who has a commission of about thirty thousand francs for me, ceilings, walls, and perhaps a portrait besides. I am to be there on the first of September, and as I must first spend a few days in Paris, you see it will be impossible for me to remain with Magadalene and the children until your return.

It breaks my heart, as you may readily suppose, to think that I shall not have an opportunity to press your hand and thank you for the happiness you have conferred upon my little sister. It would be so delightful to spend a whole month more with you. I have enjoyed myself infinitely here. This crowd of idlers amuses me exceedingly. The airs of the fine ladies who frequent the promenade; the amusing conceit of the bald-headed gentlemen; the interminable waltzes at the Casino; the races at Deauville, and the frantic flirtations that are carried on under the very eyes of the grandmammas, all this rests my mind; but the

terrible necessity of wearing patent leather shoes and kid gloves drives me away. One must respect one's self and uphold the dignity of labor. So away!

I have exhausted all the excuses for remaining that I can think of, my good Nephtali, and can not help ridiculing myself when I try to invent others; so with drooping head, I shall take the train to-morrow, immediately after breakfast, and when you receive this letter, I shall be rushing along at the rate of forty miles an hour, towards my studio. So farewell.

Do not tarry long. Society here is a little mixed, and Magdalene does not think she ought to go out much alone. Not that she wants for chaperones; besides, her two babies are an all-sufficient safeguard: but she has all our old prejudices, and prefers to remain at home if, in default of a brother's arm, she can not lean upon that of her husband. So make haste, if you do not wish her to immure herself within the walls of your villa.

* * * * * *

After September 1st, address my letters,

Care Baron Vaconsin de Bovilliers:
Château de Bovilliers,
Bovilliers, Via Mesnil-St.-Firmin (Oise).

With sincere regards,
Your affectionate scapegrace of a brother-in-law,
PIERRE WAVRE.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHATEAU DE BOVILLIERS.

THE train that bore Pierre to the château de Bovilliers the following Sunday, was three hours behind time. A short distance from Creil, part of the engine broke, and two cars were thrown from the track. Women uttered piercing shrieks; men swore like pirates; the employés hustled one another about, and there was a great rumpus, at the end of which, it was ascertained that no one had received a scratch.

On stepping out upon the platform at Breteuil, Pierre saw a tall footman who, after approaching and addressing him by name in a questioning manner, relieved him of his valise and conducted him to a victoria which was drawn up at the entrance to the station.

The vehicle was perfect in style and in appointments, and the horse, a superb blooded animal, was champing its bit and foaming with impatience, while the coachman had all he could do to restrain it. This English coachman was an equally superb specimen in his way; he sat as rigidly erect as the letter I, with his whip planted on his thigh, and with his lower jaw so firmly encased in a tall, stiff linen collar, that he could not have turned his head for all the gold of Peru.

Pierre once comfortably seated, the footman sprang

upon the box, the coachman uttered a brief command in English, and the animal started off on a swinging trot.

The château de Bovilliers is six good miles from Breteuil, and the country through which one must pass to reach it, is not so picturesque in its character as to shorten the distance. One sees only plains and fields, with an occasional bit of woods, and everywhere a profusion of stunted apple trees so loaded with fruit that the branches almost touch the ground.

The day was drawing to a close; all the birds were silent save the larks, who occasionally dropped a clear note from the glowing clouds dyed a brilliant crimson by the setting sun, though from time to time the sharp report of some persevering sportsman's rifle startled the horse, which was quickly reduced to subjection by an imperious word from the coachman. The dim light, the restful silence and the monotony of the landscape, all inclined the young man to reflection.

Once more he fancied himself a boy in the smoky shop of his now deceased father, a worthy Hollander who had entered France years before with his pack upon his back, carrying the linen and embroideries of his native land from door to door. In imagination, Pierre saw the good man admitted at most only to the servant's hall of the château which his son was about to enter as an equal. When he thought of this, a sort of timidity seized him. High as was the estimate which he had justly formed of his artistic

talent, and brilliant as were his future prospects, he was nevertheless a little surprised at the respect and consideration these people of rank accorded him, for he felt himself to be a very insignificant person in comparison with these strangers whom he regarded as individuals of a superior order—the cream of society.

Just at nightfall the carriage passed through a massive gateway; the wheels creaked noisily on the fine gravel, and through the shrubbery Pierre caught occasional glimpses of light from a doorway before which the horse soon stopped.

Thanks to the flambeaus held by two powdered lackeys, the young man could see advancing towards him, bareheaded and smoking a cigar, a tall gentleman, very distinguished in appearance, with a frank, open face: the master of the house.

"So you have come at last, my dear sir," he exclaimed, descending a few steps, with outstretched hands and smiling lips. "What befell you on the way?"

Pierre briefly informed him of the accident near Creil.

"The ladies were beginning to be anxious," remarked his host.

Then taking him by the arm, he added:

"Come, allow me to present you to them, after which I will keep you company at dinner. You must be nearly famished."

The drawing room which Pierre entered on the arm

of his host had four large windows overlooking a park, the vast extent of which was evident even in the twilight. Six large candelabra filled with candles only dimly lighted this apartment, so great was its size, but at one end of it, a bay window hung with heavy curtains formed a sort of boudoir, adorned with hot-house plants, whose luxuriant green foliage was clearly visible in the brilliant light that illuminated this cosy nook. Here, four persons, two ladies and two priests, were seated.

The elder of the ladies was short and very stout, with an immense bust, though she was so tightly laced that there seemed to be imminent danger of her breaking in two. She was still quite youthful and attractive in appearance, dressed with great care, and was as neat and shining as a new penny: Madame la Baronne Vaconsin de Bovilliers; née Antoinette de Bèlencour.

The other, aged about twenty, a brunette, with clear honest eyes, and radiant with all the beauty and grace of girlhood, was Mademoiselle Louise Vaconsin de Bovilliers.

Between the two abbés there was a singular contrast.

The one whose cassock was ornamented with a broad, *distingué* and almost coquettish band of violet, had a superb head. A mass of white hair contrasted so effectively with his dark brown eyes that one felt rather inclined to suspect that he had pulled out the black ones. He had a finely cut nose, of irreproachable contour, whose mobile nostrils quivered with the

slightest emotion; scarlet lips that displayed firm white teeth like those of a pretty female gourmand, in a smile so sweet, artless and winning that any English-woman would have been tempted to become a convert merely for the pleasure of confessing her peccadilloes to this good father. A canon of graceful form, and without a darn in his clothing, but not a shade more haughty on that account, he was also a crafty man who had taken hold of his profession by the right end. He was a missionary, a sort of home missionary and travelling preacher, who published his sermons in book form,—his sermons and other writings, which yielded him a handsome living while waiting for the Nunciature to make him a bishop, but at present simply Abbé Rémondat, a pure blooded Auvergnat.

His confrère, the exact opposite of him in every respect, a tall, sallow, angular and ungainly man, with hair as black as a raven's wing, and clad in a thread-bare cassock, was the officiating priest at Bovilliers. He was the son of the village schoolmaster who, having no other child, had sent him to the seminary in order to keep him out of the army: and to look at him, one would have judged that the poor wretch had a grudge against the entire human race.

This was a great mistake, however. M. Lahoulotte, for that was the curate's name, felt animosity only towards himself, never having forgiven himself for his folly in taking orders; but he reserved his charity for his neighbor, promising heaven to all who sought it,

for his was a nature which could no more admit the existence of a hell than the infallibility of our Holy Father the Pope, whom he called Pius IX., Leon X., or Alexander VI.

He was a resigned sufferer, who in spite of the example of the blessed Saint Laurent, did not even turn upon his gridiron. "Where the goat is tethered, there must it browse," he said to himself; and he did browse upon whatever came in his way, neglecting not even the most trivial duty.

On Philip's entrance, he was the only person to rise, not through obsequiousness to the master of a house where he had dined luxuriously, but from a natural courtesy. Besides, the young man's appearance impressed him favorably at the first glance.

There is no doubt whatever that Pierre possessed the gift of inspiring sympathy. A trifle above medium height he was, as artists say, "in proportion;" and it is a universal law that all animals and men who are "in proportion," or to use a common expression, well built, are graceful in attitude and in movement.

His brow bore the seal of genius; his eyes were unusually large, and the long lashes which shaded them imparted to them the velvety softness that characterizes those of the natives of India; his silky hair waved naturally, and the clear, olive tint of his complexion contrasted strikingly with his soft, curling black beard. A handsome fellow, but not of the type that makes one question the existence of any intellec-

tual faculties; on the contrary, his was a face that beamed with animation, wit and intelligence.

The Baroness extended her hand in response to his bow.

"You must make yourself quite at home, sir," she said graciously. "Dine first, and then rest; we will make each other's acquaintance, to-morrow."

Louise favored him with her sweetest smile, and the canon gayly rallied him on the fear he must have felt on seeing the cars jostle each other.

As for Abbé Lahoulotte, after exchanging salutations with the new comer, he inquired if the smoke of a cigar would mar the pleasure of his repast; and the young man having assured him to the contrary, he followed him and the baron into the dining room, where Pierre found his dinner awaiting him.

CHAPTER III.

"WHAT CHARMING PEOPLE!"

THE son of an army contractor under the First Empire, who had been ennobled by the founder of the dynasty as a reward for not having stolen as much as many others, Pierre's host was certainly a baron, and even more incontestably a Vaconsin, but not in the least a Bovilliers.

Having become the owner of the château in the village of that name,—thanks to his wife's dowry,—he had begun by signing himself Baron Vaconsin (of Bovilliers), then he omitted the parenthesis, and now signed himself: "Baron V. de Bovilliers."

Not that he attached any importance to it; but the baroness had begged him to do so, and he could scarcely refuse her a pleasure that cost him so little effort. After all, had she not bestowed upon him the only thing he cared for in the world, the opulence to which he felt he was justly entitled, and whose charm he appreciated all the more from the fact that he had been deprived of it early in life, first through his father's dissipation, and afterwards by his own extravagance.

It certainly did not follow, because he cheated the government less than some of his brother contractors, that the first Baron Vaconsin should have come off

empty-handed; but the return of the Bourbons grieved him so profoundly, that for fear of falling into a state of melancholy, the worthy man plunged into excesses which made a very sensible diminution in the savings with which his son had supposed he would be able to alleviate his grief for the loss of his father. Nevertheless, having been reared in the same school, when he came into possession of such property as his parent had not been able to squander, the young baron continued to live so well, that one morning his lawyer informed him that he had received the last penny of his inheritance.

Any other person would have experienced some anxiety, but he was too much of a philosopher. From the very first, he gave up all idea of earning his living in any way whatsoever. His was too haughty a soul to stoop to such degradation; besides, he was assured by his friends that he possessed certain personal attractions which, together with his title of Baron, could not fail to relieve him of his embarrassment by means of a wealthy marriage.

It was not very difficult for him to believe this, for he was really an attractive person in every sense of the word, tall, handsome, a superb rider, an indefatigable sportsman, a skillful leader of the German and the possessor of incomparable genius as an inventor of pleasure parties.

What more could one desire? How could a man thus fortunately endowed find any difficulty in extri-

cating himself from financial trouble through some one of the many heiresses who are, as every one knows, created for the express purpose of replenishing the purses of noblemen who have squandered their patrimony.

Still, it was not a favorable opportunity for operations of that sort. The advocates of electoral reform were harassing good M. Guizot so badly, that not knowing what was about to happen, wealthy families hesitated to dower their daughters. The Revolution of '48 put a stop to this entirely, and for some time after the Coup d'Etat, fathers dowered only such daughters as threatened to remain on their hands indefinitely, unless they untied their purse strings. But after the establishment of the Second Empire some of his father's old friends reappeared as if by enchantment, people of importance now, rolling along in their carriages, keeping open house, and making hay while the sun shone, particularly at the Bourse, and favorably disposed towards every body and every thing in any way connected with the First Empire.

Consequently, the son of the former contractor had only to show himself, to become a prominent member of the band. His name was enough.

Still, none of the positions offered him were satisfactory.

"Why should you marvel at it?" he would reply. "I am not in a position to make a suitable appearance at Court, or to represent the imperial government

properly. Ah! if I had only married earlier. It is too late now, you see, to think of that."

His friends sneered at these objections, and as many of the old nobility, weary of sulking unnoticed, were beginning to make overtures to the new dynasty, the daughter of a Marquis de Bèlencour who coveted a seat in the Senate was regarded as a very suitable bride for the gentleman. The father welcomed the suggestion with marked enthusiasm; but the daughter protested loudly. "A paltry baron of the Empire for her? A Bèlencour wed a Vaconsin? Impossible!"

But her father, the Marquis, wishing to be a senator at any price, forced her to swallow the pill in spite of her mortification.

But she at least had her revenge. Realizing that her husband was essentially a pleasure seeker, she attempted to dissuade him from employing their fortune in giving *prestige* to the government. She was pretty; she still had for him the charm of novelty, and her triumph was the more complete from the fact that the baron, though fond of authority, felt no desire to be hampered with restraints which must, it seemed to him, be extremely tiresome and unpleasant to such persons as were obliged to submit to them by reason of official position.

As a natural consequence, his noble protectors ceased to interest themselves in him, which led to the ruin of his renegade father's ambition; and that nobleman felt such an intense chagrin at having

betrayed his party and forsaken his principles *for nothing*, that he pined and died, to the secret delight of his son-in-law, who was happy to pocket the whole of his dupe's property.

Still, we must do the baron the justice to say, that without assuming the administrative harness, or the robes of a dignitary, he tripled their fortune within the brief space of two years. A handsome man, and a most agreeable companion, he ingratiated himself into the favor and intimate friendship of the magnates of the epoch. Morny never went into an enterprise without reserving a goodly slice for his friend; Haussman never planned an improvement without he succeeded (how, we shall never know) in informing the baron that such or such a piece of property would soon be doubled in value.

He was such a handsome fellow! Copying one who at that time passed for the most accomplished of gentlemen, and the flower of chivalry and fashion, there was something in his careless freedom of speech, and in the disdainful carelessness of his manner that betrayed the cynical indifference of a man whose battle has been fought and won. The result of all this was to win him considerable reputation as a wit. He felt so secure from any possible misfortune that he did not hesitate to ridicule the trials and perplexities of others: and certain newspapers chronicled his sayings with unwearied devotion.

On the contrary, certain pamphlets published, in

spite of the police, handled him very roughly, and exhibited the successful adventurer in his true colors. But he turned a deaf ear to all this, pretending to ignore the attacks of these miscreants.

Ignore them! how could he? His wife did not neglect a single opportunity to place them directly under his nose, manifesting an indignation which she did not experience in the least, for on the contrary, she was very glad to wound this plebeian who had been forced upon her acceptance—this Vaconsin ennobled only yesterday by the Duke of Enghien's assassin.

Mlle. Antoinette de Bèlencour still hated her husband with a deadly hatred, and though she worshipped her children—she had not been able to avoid bringing two into the world—she detested their father all the more because he was their father. In fact, had it not been for her religious principles and the strict ultramontane education she had received, she would have infinitely preferred that her son and daughter had derived their being from a different source; and though fitted by nature for a peaceful domestic life, there was nothing annoying and painful that she did not wish her lord and master, for whom she continued to feel the greatest contempt in spite of the softening influences of time and maternity. On account of the ties that bound him to the prominent persons of the Second Empire, she openly rejoiced at its fall on the Fourth of September, though her companion in life paid no attention whatever to her exultation.

For what difference did the downfall of the Empire make to him, now? He had obtained all he desired: so if his wife thought to goad him to desperation by her expressions of delight, she was greatly mistaken.

Never since the creation of the world did a man and woman who had sworn to mutually love and honor each other, hate each other to such an extent. But the real state of affairs was apparent to no one. Even their children did not suspect it, and though the Baroness went to confession regularly every fortnight, and though she consulted Abbé Rémondat by letter or verbally when he was near at hand, upon the most trivial questions of duty, her feelings in regard to the Baron remained a sealed letter, a secret between herself and her compassionate God.

There is no doubt that Vaconsin himself suspected her feelings: but as his education forbade alike any scandal and any abusive words, and as he had his own way in all important matters, he paid but little attention to his wife's systematic hostility.

He allowed her, however, the greatest freedom in all matters that concerned herself and the government of her household. There had been a little trouble at first in regard to the children; but that was of slight duration; the children yielding as easily to the influence of the father as to that of the mother.

The son entered Saint-Cyr, from which he emerged a second lieutenant in a regiment of Chasseurs. As

bitterly opposed to the Bonapartism of the father as to the legitimist opinions of the mother, his sympathies were with the men who had at least succeeded in saving the national honor in the explosion.

As for Louise, her independence of character was an acknowledged fact. When she was only sixteen, her confessor having said a word too much, she announced her intention of working out her own salvation. The baron openly exulted; the baroness was greatly scandalized; and the brother talked of breaking the head of the man who had ventured to offend his sister; but the young girl calmed her brother, embraced Madame Antoinette, *née* de Bèlencour, and begging her father not to persist, she held to her resolution though she sedulously avoided any further discussion on the subject. We repeat, a character.

All this, which it is necessary to know in order to understand this story, our friend Pierre did not even suspect. Besides, he was one of those persons who go straight onward, believing what people tell them and making no effort to see the other side of the picture. Moreover, why should this particularly interest him? Brought here by one definite object, what did the temperament of his hosts matter to him. He was to regard them as customers, nothing more. If they treated him with courtesy that was all he had a right to ask.

He had reason to be more than satisfied in this respect. On the very first evening, while keeping him company at the table, the baron chatted with a freedom

and familiarity that the artist thought a little premature, especially as his host's very condescension gave the new-comer an impression of haughtiness; but on his return to the drawing room, the baroness, her daughter and Abbé Rémondat all treated him with such exquisite tact, that Pierre, entirely reassured, on retiring to his room, mentally exclaimed:

"What charming people!"

CHAPTER IV.

A TELLTALE LETTER.

TO *Madame Morseux*,
Villa Belle-Air, Trouville.

My Dearest Sister:

It is three days since I reached the Château de Bovilliers, and as school boys say to their good parents, "I now take my pen in hand in the hope that this will find you the same." They seldom specify how, but the heart supplies the omission, divining the real meaning.

This is a genuine château, my dear sister, that is to say, it realizes my conception of one, and of a delightful residence. There is no "North Tower," with recently fabricated ruins of dungeons, no guard-room, nor fosses, nor machicolations, nothing gloomy or frightful to poor wretches of my rank, Pariahs, released from slavery only yesterday.

Imagine Malmaison in the midst of a park which, were it not for the absolute absence of any water course, might easily be mistaken for the favorite retreat of the Empress Josephine.

But how differently the mansion is furnished! There is nothing in the ponderous style of the Empire; everything is elegant, harmonious, and comfortable to the last degree! Wealth is a good thing after all!

I was received with a cordiality that made me feel perfectly at ease from the very first. The Baron alone made me a little uncomfortable with his unceremonious manner; I had not reached the *hors d'œuvres* at dinner before he called me: "My dear fellow." It seemed to me this was going a little too fast, and I felt tempted to tap him on the waistcoat and retort by calling him: "Old gentleman."

But noticing that he applies the same title to the two abbés who are staying here, I have ceased to feel sensitive on that score, and have come to the conclusion that it is merely a habit he contracted while frequenting the society of the magnates connected with the former Court, particularly that of Morny, whom he must have taken for a model and copied servilely in former years. Like the ex-President of the Chamber, he drawls, winks with a knowing air, as if to give people to understand that he says much less than he means, and affects the condescending affability of a *grand seigneur*, in spite of which the ass's ear, or rather the *parvenu* peeps forth from under the lion's skin. He is a man who has *made* himself *comme il faut;* blood is wanting. The effort betrays itself much oftener than he supposes.

With his wife, it is very different. She was born a lady, and she possesses the instinctive composure and the unaffected affability of a great lady. Heavens! how pretty she must have been. The very type of a court favorite. She has all the characteristics—the

seductive grace, and that inclination to piety which, in the good old times when we ranked a little lower than spaniels — would have circumscribed her destiny between a palace and a Carmelite's cell.

On the day following my arrival, they explained the work that was expected of me. It is well worth the trouble of coming; there is a chance to distinguish one's self. Another task which interests me quite as much, is the portrait of the daughter of the house, which I am to begin at once, as the architect is not yet ready for me.

She is a young lady about twenty years of age, with remarkable eyes and an expression which it will be very difficult to catch, and even more difficult to fix upon canvas, so original is its character, so wonderful the play of expression. I am enchanted, and at the same time, a little intimidated by my task. Not that I am inclined to doubt my skill, but under the conditions upon which I am to engage in the work, I must succeed at once. Consequently I am a trifle anxious.

You cannot imagine, my dear child, what a difficult model this is. The features are already mine to such an extent that I could reproduce them from memory at night, without a light; but there is a fire, an intelligence and vivacity in the face which frighten me. I must seize this in its flight; portray the spark that flashes in the eye; endow these features with the changeful charm of a bit of sun-lit sky that lies

between two clouds flying before the breath of the tempest.

I must accomplish this, however, if only to gratify my pride, of which you know I have my share; I must fully satisfy myself. But see how foolish one can be! The success I promise myself annoys me in advance, and before I even know that I shall attain it. It vexes me to think that if I make this portrait what it ought to be, and what I wish it to be, I shall be obliged to give it up, and that under no pretext whatever shall I be permitted to keep it, or even to see it again, however much I may desire to do so. Authors are more fortunate; their works remain with them, while with us, all that is completed passes from our hands forever. This portrait, in the perfecting of which, I shall expend all that is noblest and best in me; my knowledge, my talent, all my genius, (in the sense that people of the present day use this word) will hang some day in the cabinet of a nobleman who has wedded this beautiful girl, but who will perhaps see in it only a piece of furniture, an article in the inventory of the personal estate belonging to his wife.

Oh, the brute! I begin to hate him now, this dolt for whom I am to work, and whose dupe I am, to all intents and purposes. Is it not enough and more than enough, that the original should be reserved for him? There is one who will find it imprudent to call me "my dear fellow."

But I forget that you will be utterly unable to

understand my enthusiasm, since you have no idea of the charms that have excited it; and really I must admit that to write so much about a person whom you will probably never meet is a poor way to induce you to share it. The practice of art leads to these weaknesses, these idiotic monologues. There have been times in former years when I paced the quais for hours, composing romances of which the Venus of Milo was the heroine. Twenty times, in imagination I have been her lover; I have fought for her; I have vanquished, and pitilessly crushed the hateful rivals born of my frenzied admiration. And yet, in all these absurd but delightful dreams, I never went so far as to reinvest her with her arms. But what would she have been without them!

Mlle. Louise de Bovilliers has two, which are absolutely perfect in their classical contour. I have seen them on several occasions under sleeves of thin guipure which imparted to the skin the transparency of Italian marble. They are beautiful arms, my dear sister, and the Venus of Milo would be fortunate, indeed, to find any to equal them.

You are laughing at me, are you not? And perhaps you are asking if I am not becoming mad. Ah, I cannot swear to the contrary. I assure you my head would be turned if I did not remember who I am.

But I do remember, my dear, so you need have no fears. These are only the transports of an artist.

To descend to reason at last. Mlle. de Bovilliers is

an accomplished young girl; in addition to rare beauty, she possesses a most affable nature, and like her mother, is endowed with that tact which renders one irresistibly attractive. So there is no reason why I should cease to talk of her. Do not entertain any absurd fancies, little sister. You know very well that I am no fool. It is the artist, you see, who is lost in admiration of this charming creature.

Good night, my good Magdalene. It is two o'clock in the morning. I am going to bed to dream of the Venus of Milo with Mlle. Louise's arms, and to-morrow all this will be forgotten.

Has Nephtali returned? Are you promenading the beach, leaning on his epauletted arm?

A thousand kisses for my nephews, telling them to return some to you, from

Your Brother,

PIERRE WAVRE.

CHAPTER V.

A SLIGHT ADVENTURE.

NEARLY every morning Louise sat for her portrait, a corner of the main drawing-room serving as a studio. Generally the baroness, the canon or a certain lady companion, who was never known to speak, occupied the adjoining boudoir, but the dimensions of the apartment in which Pierre was working, rendered the young people virtually alone.

At first, Louise experienced intense embarrassment under the persistent and necessarily searching gaze of the artist. She thought she would soon become accustomed to it, since it was purely obligatory; but she could not overcome the secret uneasiness it caused. This attentive and repeated scrutiny of each detail; these eyes deliberately riveted upon the lines of her neck, her shoulders and her breast, caused her deep annoyance in spite of her reason and good sense. It even seemed to her there was an imaginary contact which she had not foreseen, and whose prolonged continuance shocked her modesty. She almost fancied she could read a growing admiration; something like a secret delight in the young artist's eyes.

To drive away this feeling, and divert the attention of the painter, she talked; and the careless tone in

which he replied at last began to reassure her a little. Her extreme modesty ceased to take alarm: she forgot herself, and after that, she felt no constraint. Laughter quickly breaks the ice between young people. The artist and Louise speedily became conscious of a mutual love of fun, and their witty sallies soon established between them a friendly familiarity which they enjoyed, and which surprised no one.

The following Friday—a bad day for superstitious people — the baron proposed an excursion to a point of interest in the neighborhood, and about three o'clock the carriages were drawn up before the main entrance, and the party took their seats in them hap-hazard.

Madame and Mlle. Bovilliers took their places on the back seat of the barouche, and the lady companion on the seat opposite.

"Get in with the ladies," the baron said to Pierre. "I will take the abbés and the doctor with me in the phaeton."

The doctor was a physician from Bréteuil who came to the château every Friday and spent the day, whether any one was ill there or not.

The young artist found himself exactly opposite Louise. They had proceeded but a short distance when the carriage gave a sudden lurch. One of the horses, exhilarated perhaps by the pungent odor of the pines, began to caper and prance, pulling against the bit with all his might, and dragging his companion along in a zig-zag course which forced two of the

wheels up an embankment on the side of the road; but the coachman, who understood his business, turned to his mistress and said:

"Have no fears Madame; it is a mere trifle."

But even as he spoke, one of the lines broke, and the restive animal finding himself at liberty, started off in the direction of some ploughed fields, separated from the road only by a ditch filled with mud, in which the party ran an imminent risk of being spilled.

In order to avoid disturbing the ladies, Pierre sprang out upon the carriage step, clambered upon the box, and from there, out upon the shaft, where, clinging to the horse's mane with one hand, he pulled upon the bit with the other until he succeeded in reducing the refractory steed to subjection.

The whole affair occupied scarcely ten seconds, and there is no society for the encouragement of valòr which could have found in Pierre's exploit any pretext for awarding him the humblest of medals. He had not saved the life of any person; he had not even exposed himself to the risk of a bruise; so he began to ridicule himself when his companions lavished thanks and congratulations upon him.

The coachman and the footman sprang from the box, and the baron hastily alighted from his phaeton. The damage was soon repaired, and the excursion was not abandoned for such a trifle; but on returning to the château, Pierre could not disguise the fact that he was very lame.

"So much the better!" he exclaimed, "it makes me appear interesting."

But his indifference found no echo. Nothing would do but that the doctor must accompany him to his apartment to see what was the matter.

Nothing at all. A slight strain of one of the muscles of the leg, which would be entirely cured by twenty-four hours of rest; but this repose must be carefully observed, if not, inflammation might set in, and confine the artist to his room for a fortnight. Above all, there must be no walking, no going up or down stairs.

Pierre was obliged to obey, for all the members of the family entreated him not to overwhelm with remorse those he had saved. They insisted and pleaded. Besides, they made such arrangements as would prevent the possibility of ennui. One of the apartments placed at his disposal was a salon of considerable size, and there they could all assemble in the evening; there Louise could sit for her portrait if he insisted upon continuing his work on that; and there, his meals could be served: in short, they were all so determined to regard him in the light of a hero, that they were really incensed when he made light of his injury.

The twenty-four hours were prolonged until the following Monday; it was not until Tuesday that he was allowed to go down stairs, and even then his friends would insist that he should keep his limb stretched out upon a cushion.

All this, though trifling in itself, showed to what

extent he had won the regard of his entertainers. They were his friends now; the baron lavished his "my dear fellows" on the young man, actually crammed his pockets with cigars, and insisted upon taking him to visit all the neighbors; the baroness strove in every possible way, to make his sojourn in the house agreeable; the canon waxed eloquent over his painting, and Abbé Lahoulotte talked philosophy with him unweariedly.

As for Louise, she had gradually become accustomed to the artist's society, and had fallen into the habit of conversing with him in an unconstrained and friendly fashion for hours together. She no longer felt uncomfortable under the professional attention with which he scrutinized her during the sittings; the conversation interrupted by breakfast, was generally continued in their walks through the park, and everything was progressing so pleasantly that no one thought for a moment of any possible change in the situation.

Consequently, when the canon on the receipt of a letter, announced the speedy arrival of a stranger, the news was displeasing to every one. The deuce take the intruder who was to appear at such an inopportune moment! No one had any business to crowd himself in among people who were enjoying themselves so much together, and who only asked that the existing state of things should remain unchanged as long as possible.

Nevertheless, on the following Friday—an unlucky

day, we repeat—the new comer arrived at the appointed hour, exquisitely dressed, and received the courteous greetings of the master and mistress of the house with smiling assurance.

He was a young man, rather too tall and slender, and very light complexioned. He seemed to be ashamed of his height, and stooped a little as if to conceal it. His thin yellow hair was plastered down in two waves on his forehead, *á la Capoul*, by the aid of a liberal supply of cosmétique; his lashes and eyebrows were also yellow, and his greenish-gray eyes, half concealed by heavy lids, had a rather wandering, vacant expression. Thin moustaches, waxed into sharp points, projected over a pair of long reddish side whiskers, which hung, in the Austrian fashion, as low as the collar bone; and the whole was powdered and rouged, and oiled and waxed until one could think of nothing but the wax heads that hair dressers formerly exhibited in their shop windows. And how gorgeously he was apparelled! There was not a single wrinkle in coat, pants or waistcoat, and his linen was of dazzling whiteness and metallic stiffness. A double watch chain with a cameo pendant, upon which his coat of arms was engraved, dangled over his vest; gloves of perfumed kid adorned his hands, and the tops of his low pointed shoes were daintily embroidered and revealed red silk stockings, clocked with violet. Add to all this, an eye glass fixed in the left eye, and a small cane with a richly wrought silver handle, and

you have a correct portrait of the young man who was ushered by the canon into the drawing room under the title of:

"The Count Godefroy d'Aitignies."

Then after an interchange of bows:

"The son of one of the friends of my youth," added the ecclesiastic. "Now an orphan, he has only me left in a world from which his parents have been recalled by the Most High."

Whereupon, there was another interchange of bows, each person being still rather ungraciously inclined towards this sallow young man in spite of the cordial handshake of Baron de Bovilliers, who called him "my dear fellow" with an urbanity which was at the service of the first comer.

After which he whispered in Pierre's ear:

"Whom do you think he resembles?"

"If you asked me what he resembled, I should find it much less difficult to reply," answered the artist.

"No; seriously—Imagine him in a cassock—"

"What?"

"The image of the canon, my dear fellow. Look again."

The artist bestowed upon Count d'Aitignies one of those glances of professional scrutiny which nothing escapes, then responded:

"He is, indeed, a faded copy of the canon!"

CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGE STORY OF YEARS GONE BY.

IF the new guest at Bovilliers resembled the canon, it was probably only by chance.

The aged people residing in the neighborhood of Valenciennes, still relate a singular story that dates back about thirty years. They say that in the last year of the reign of Louis Phillippe, a certain Count d'Aitignies, a deputy from the department, finding himself suddenly in possession of a son, was so greatly astonished that he had the rashness to accuse his wife of infidelity. As he was a man of the world, and consequently as uncommunicative as an oyster; and as members of fashionable society dislike nothing so much as a public scandal, the fact of his suspicions was disclosed only by his servants, who, by listening at doors, managed to overhear something which they repeated, and the following day the whole town knew what had occurred.

They talked of a terrible scene and of maledictions and menaces that made one's blood run cold, until it became difficult to convince more than one good soul that the husband had not cut the countess in pieces.

The unfortunate man had not thought of such a course, however. The disgrace which had nearly

crazed him, had affected him in an entirely different manner. He had sobbed like a child.

When his tears were exhausted, he proceeded to interrogate his wife, but the erring woman would say nothing more than:

"You have a right to kill me. Do so at once. I shall not complain or offer any resistance, neither shall I make any attempt to excite your compassion for a momentary weakness and infatuation. I shall submit to your just wrath with resignation; but do not expect me to divulge the name of my betrayer. That is a thing I can not do."

The count revolved the matter in his mind. A deputy, and consequently accountable to public opinion; a nobleman, and consequently extremely sensitive in regard to his honor, he cherished the hope of slaying the person who had tarnished his escutcheon, for we all know that there is, or that there is supposed to be, only one honorable and effectual method of wiping out such a disgrace. The deputy asked nothing better; but where should he find his adversary? That was the difficulty.

One morning, after a night of terrible agony, the unfortunate count rushed to his wife's apartment, pistol in hand, intending to kill her; but on beholding her, the memories of the past returned with such power, that the thought of slaying an unarmed and defenceless creature seemed to him the basest of crimes. Then, he made a final resolve. During the six months

that immediately followed, he heavily mortgaged all his property, and made a friend formally promise to dispose of the money thus obtained, in accordance with secret instructions; then, one evening after the session of the Chamber was concluded, he went to the Café Anglais, where he dined alone in a corner of the room. Subsequently he sent for a hackney coach and ordered the coachman to take him to the Bois. On reaching the site of the former Winter Garden, in the Champs-Élysées, the driver, who was half asleep was suddenly startled by the report of a pistol. When he opened the carriage door, he found his passenger stretched lifeless across the seat. He had just blown his brains out.

Throughout Valenciennes there was but a single cry,

"Poor man! he was mad!"

Some few who remembered the rumors in circulation at the time of the birth of his only son, suggested domestic troubles; but they were silenced by the retort:

"It was only despair at the loss of his money. He has left nothing whatever for his family;" and thinking of the widow, every one exclaimed:

"Poor lady!"

In fact, the claims, or pretended claims of creditors swallowed up the entire estate. Everything was sold, and the countess returned to her parents with nothing save her dowry. The child was placed in charge of a nurse in the country, and its mother mourned her loss so deeply that her already impaired health soon

gave way entirely. One night, she rang her bell wildly, and the summons was promptly answered. She begged that a priest should be sent for immediately, but after receiving the sacrament, she lingered about a week and then died.

Her obsequies were of a most imposing character. All Valenciennes attended the funeral, and the people lined the streets, to gaze admiringly at the hearse, loaded with flowers.

It was impossible to bury her by the side of her husband, for he, having perished by his own hand, could not repose in consecrated ground.

Such is the story still related by the old inhabitants of the city; but it was doubtless purely out of Christian charity that Abbé Remondat, who had been the priest of the parish to which the countess belonged, interested himself in the orphan who had been left without a patrimony in consequence of the deputy's ruin.

In any case, it is certain that this interest still continued, for the canon had positively taken it into his head to engraft the escutcheon of the Barons Vaconsin (of Bovilliers) upon that of the Counts of Aitignies.

CHAPTER VII.

A REVELATION.

BOVILLIERS, which contained barely sixty dwellings scattered about the château, had no municipal existence, nor did it possess any church; and to attend divine service, the faithful of the hamlet were obliged to traverse the two or three miles that separated them from the parish church in which Abbé Lahoulotte officiated.

Every Sunday, at ten o'clock the baron's carriages drew up before the entrance of the château, and the whole family entered them to go and hear mass, as the laws of politeness generally led their guests to accompany them.

On the first Sunday following his arrival, Pierre had been prevented from conforming to this custom by the accident of which he had been the victim a couple of days before, the physician having expressly forbidden him to leave his room. But he had entirely recovered from his injury now; and on the second Sunday the young artist came down about half an hour before the appointed time. Louise and her father were already on the steps, and it was not long before Godefroy made his appearance in an irresistible country toilet. A little felt hat with a rolling rim, and a tiny

woodcock's feather on the side gave him an almost grotesque appearance; and his pantaloons, coat and vest were of a yellowish tint with dashes of blue and green. He found Pierre and Louise engaged in an animated conversation, which the young lady did not seem at all inclined to allow him to interrupt, so Godefroy feeling himself *de trop*, approached the lady-companion who was standing alone a short distance off.

Louise and the artist did not seem to notice his retreat, but continued to talk with an absence of constraint which denoted no little enjoyment on the part of each; and when the approach of Abbé Remondat put an end to their virtual tête-à-tête, Louise experienced a vague annoyance. The conversation then became general, and alluding to Godefroy who was still standing at a little distance, the abbé inquired:

"Well, what do you think of him on the whole?"

On hearing this question, and without waiting to hear the courteous baron's reply, Louise and Pierre exchanged one of those hasty and involuntary glances which indicate a more complete and thorough understanding than the persons themselves are really conscious of. There was in the glance a mixture of mischief, concealed amusement and raillery; and they looked not unlike two school-children mocking the master who was watching them. The abbé observed this significant look, and it aroused his uneasiness. He asked himself if it could be possible that this young girl felt too much admiration for the artist.

Hers was not a nature to be deterred by certain prejudices, but on the contrary, to think it quite natural that she should marry the artist if she loved him. And why should she not? He was no ordinary man; a brilliant future was in store for him. He might reasonably hope for triumphs which would ensure him an elevated place in the aristocracy of genius; besides, this winner of the prize of Rome was undeniably handsome.

He had already won an enviable reputation; his name, which frequently appeared in the journals of the day, was always accompanied with glowing praises, and the public already knew who Pierre Wavre was.

This glance also furnished him with other unpalatable food for reflection. It showed him the impression the tall Godefroy had produced upon Louise. To tell the plain, unvarnished truth, she regarded him as a grotesque creature, scarcely worthy of notice; and she certainly would have laughed heartily had any one told her that the canon intended to induce her to accept the youth as a husband.

Just then, the baroness appeared, fresh and radiant. Arrayed as elaborately and becomingly as if to attend court, there was in her eyes all the satisfaction and complacency of a woman who, on beholding herself in the glass, is convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that she is still beautiful. She received the bows and salutations of her guests with an affability which won the heart of each, then she cried gayly:

"Come, come, we shall be late, and the curé is always in such haste to conclude the service that it is doubtful if we arrive in time for the benediction."

In a moment, they were all seated in the carriages.

"Urge your horses," she remarked to the coachman.

"Permit me to drive you, Madame," said Pierre. "If you will, I solemnly assure you that you shall not lose a single word of the service!"

The baroness laughingly consented. The young man mounted the box and took the lines from the coachman, and they started off in grand style, for the horses were confined too much in the stable, and were only too glad to fly along at the top of their speed.

The brisk motion created a faint breeze which made the long plumes on the hats of the ladies flutter gayly; while their gauze veils streamed out behind them like clouds flying along against the dark blue sky.

Pierre drove admirably; an accomplishment highly esteemed in fashionable society where, for want of something better to do, many of the scions of our most aristocratic families take a pride in rivaling the achievements of stage-drivers and horse-jockeys, and the baroness liked him the better for his skill. What a remarkably accomplished gentleman this artist was! He had already proved himself an unusually skilful performer on the piano; in fact, he had shown himself an adept in everything, even down to croquet, and how adroitly he handled the lines. A truly

accomplished gentleman, for he even told stories with a *verve* and tact that were absolutely irresistible.

She enlarged upon his perfections to her companions, and Louise listened to her mother's praises with a satisfaction which did not escape the observation of the canon, her vis-a-vis in the barouche.

Really, the baroness did not exaggerate. Pierre drove with remarkable ease; it seemed to be only play for him. Holding the reins in one hand, he occasionally turned to the ladies, and took part in the conversation, uttering every now and then some witty sally, without neglecting his horses for an instant, and guiding them swiftly, but very cleverly.

And Louise smiled at this insignificant triumph, making no attempt to conceal her satisfaction. Pierre read it in her eyes; and seeing her so pretty and elated, he experienced an undefined joy which he would have found it difficult to explain.

Besides, what was the use of attempting to do so? Being somewhat of a philosopher, he had resolved to enjoy a delightful present, guarding himself with instinctive prudence from any attempt to discover the consequences that might result from it.

Certainly, the abbé was wrong to take offence at all this. Pierre was only enjoying himself in a sort of amateur fashion without entertaining any hopes whatever. He was glad to be alive, that was all.

The last stroke of the bell was still quivering in the air when they reached the square in front of the

church. Other carriages were driving up at the same time from different directions, and the peasants also obstructed their passage. Not until then, did Pierre indulge in a little coquetry. Putting one hand carelessly in his pocket, he guided the spirited horses with the other with such skill that they reached the portico in advance of everybody else, without interfering with any one, or obliging any other carriage to wait.

"Bravo!" exclaimed the baroness.

He made a little mischievous movement of the head, and leaping lightly from his perch, he assisted her to alight.

"I will hire you by the year," she added gayly.

"Only too greatly honored to serve you in any capacity, Madame," replied the young man.

Instead of offering his hand to Louise, he closed it and presented his forearm.

The baroness appreciated his delicacy, and still laughing, remarked:

"You are truly a perfect gentleman."

"At least, I have known some, Madame," was his reply.

Louise expected to enter the church on his arm, but the baron and Godefroy coming up at that moment, Pierre moved aside, and as the party entered the edifice, he drew back a few steps, and remained outside.

The return to the château was made under entirely different conditions. Godefroy took a seat in the barouche, and Pierre went in the phaeton which the baron was driving.

"Have you a cigar," he said casually to that gentleman as they took their seats.

Vaconsin passed him his case without a word, and during the entire drive only two or three commonplace remarks were exchanged between them.

On reaching Bovilliers, the ladies went immediately to their rooms; the canon took Godefroy with him for a walk through the park, and the baron, after asking the coachman a few questions, repaired to the stables.

No one addressed a word to the artist, who instinctively felt a sudden and intentional coldness on the part of all.

"What can be the cause of it?" he asked himself with no little uneasiness. "Is it because I did not enter the church; because I did not attend the service? Really, it seems to me it would be rather exacting to insist upon that; still, it would have made no difference to me, and had I supposed they desired it, I should have made no objection. But after all, why should it make any difference to them?"

He had no idea that they were really angry with him. He thought such a thing improbable for such a trivial cause.

In fact, he thought it so improbable, that in perfect good faith he reviewed all his words and acts of the morning. Had any objectionable word escaped him? Had he unintentionally shown any want of respect? These things sometimes happen to the best-intentioned men.

But he could recall nothing of the kind; on the contrary, reflection convinced him that his manner towards all had been characterized by the strictest propriety.

Three-quarters of an hour afterwards, the party assembled at the table. Pierre prudently waited for others to address him. They did not fail to do so, and he experienced a sensation of relief. Still, a shade of difference soon struck him. An unwonted reserve was apparent in the remarks addressed to him; a pretence of confining the conversation to the artistic work he had undertaken. What a difference in the situation! Only that morning, he had been on the footing of an intimate friend; now he was treated with ceremony and reserve. Even the baron addressed him as "My dear Sir."

As for Louise, more incensed or more frank than the others, she did not seem to be even conscious of his presence.

Why? He did not know, and felt more deeply pained than humiliated. Pained? But why? The astonishment caused by such a question was followed by a vague and nameless terror which he dared not attempt to analyze, so intimidated was he by a presentiment of misfortune which bewildered him completely.

To banish this, he seized upon the next remark in the conversation and talked on eagerly, compelling his companion to give him their attention, and resolved

to make Louise depart from the indifference that she had assumed.

What did he say? He scarcely knew, but a sullen anger seemed to put the right words in his mouth. The topic of conversation happened to be independence. Remembering what he had read in Proudhon on this subject, Pierre began to sneer at the pretensions of mankind in this respect.

"Independence is indeed an absurd dream," remarked the canon. "Show me a truly independent man, I entreat."

"Were it not for my modesty, I should offer myself as an example," replied Pierre.

Rémondat smiled faintly.

"Ah, young man!" he retorted, "how easy it would be for me to enumerate the many yokes to which you are subservient."

"I should be very grateful if you would do so, if only in order that I might be able to free myself."

The controversy gradually became more vehement; and considerable bitterness was displayed by the canon, who perhaps desired to excite the artist's anger.

"I fear," he observed, "that in the majority of cases there is nothing but childishness in these manifestations of independence which you laud so much."

"An example!" cried the young man, "for all this is extremely vague, Monsieur."

"An example? Will you allow me to choose one from your own conduct?"

"I beg you will do so."

"And you will not be angry?"

"You are too good-natured for me to run any risk of that. Speak plainly, and I shall be infinitely obliged to you."

The ecclesiastic smiled anew like a wise and indulgent man who does not desire the death of a sinner, but who, sure of the tacit approval of his audience, condescends to triumph with moderation and excessive urbanity.

"Come now," said he, "confess that you thought to create a great sensation just now by braving every one, and asserting your vaunted independence by not entering the church with these ladies."

The thrust was direct, and every one listened attentively for the reply.

"A good shot!" muttered the baron.

The baroness laughed in advance at the confusion she expected to see depicted on the artist's countenance; and Louise experienced a bitter joy. Scandalized by the young man's absence, she felt avenged by Rémondat's reproach.

Still, an inclination to condone his fault existed. If Pierre made any apology, no matter how slight, she was ready to forgive him. But what if he made no attempt to defend himself? What if he aggravated his offence by pretending to be unconscious of it, or by persistently declaring that he had done right? Under such circumstances, she would despise and hate him.

With all the strength of a secret and incomprehensible desire she longed for an ingenious and witty *meâ culpâ*, were it only a jest that would disarm her, or something equivalent to an admission that he had forgotten the deference due to several ladies, and especially to herself; in short, a regret, no matter how it was expressed, at having failed in politeness towards his entertainers.

Up to that time, she had avoided glancing at the young man, but now she turned her eyes full upon him.

"What is he going to say in reply?" she was anxiously asking herself; and as she waited with suspended breath, she could almost hear the violent beating of her heart. To her great surprise and bitter disappointment, Pierre smiled. A terrible indignation seized her.

"I think, Monsieur," he said with malicious sweetness, "that persons of your profession should carefully guard against such hasty and even rash judgments."

The priest bridled a little on receiving this response, and his friends seemed wounded.

"Why, for instance," continued the artist in the same sweet and conciliatory tone, "should you attribute such a foolish motive to me. Since I have had the honor to be treated here with a consideration which I by no means deserve, what have I ever done that should lead you to suppose me so ill-bred? And how happens it that the charity you profess, has not suggested to you the idea of procuring further informa-

tion before accusing one almost publicly of a breach of good manners?"

Then turning to the baroness, he added:

"If I deprived myself, Madame, of the honor of accompanying you into church, it was only from a feeling of reserve, in which I intreat you to see only an evidence of my respect for you and for your faith."

"I confess that I fail to clearly understand you," replied Madame de Bovilliers.

"Being sure of the sincerity of your professions, I feared that my presence beside you during the service would seem to you a profanation."

"A profanation? And why, sir?"

"Because I am a Jew, Madame. Were you not aware of it?"

Pierre, watching them as they hung breathless on his words, did not doubt that this announcement would petrify them with horror. But nothing of the kind. Their faces cleared as if by enchantment.

"A Jew, that is to say: an Israelite! You are——"

"As much of a Jew as it is possible for any one to be, Madame."

"Forgive me, my dear child," said the priest, suddenly extending his hand. "I had no idea of such a thing. There is nothing in your name or appearance to give one the slightest suspicion of the fact. I humbly apologize."

"We certainly owe you amends," added the baroness, "and I cannot but appreciate the delicacy

of your scruples, though I assure you that I am not so intolerant as you suppose. I have some valued friends among persons of your religious faith, as well as among the Protestants; and I took it no more amiss that they attended my marriage at St. Roch, than I hesitated to pray for them in their own temple when they in turn, solemnized their nuptials."

"The baroness is right, my dear fellow," said the Vaconsin. "Intolerance would be very ridiculous nowadays."

"Nevertheless, you regarded me rather dubiously," said Pierre.

"You do not understand, my dear fellow. We supposed you a free thinker."

CHAPTER VIII.

MENTAL CONFLICTS.

WHILE the baron and his wife, the canon, the lady companion, and even Godefroy were striving to make amends for the slighting manner in which they had treated Pierre, Louise made her escape from the room.

The hurried step with which she had descended the steps of the perron, relaxed when she reached a shaded walk, where, on finding a bench, she threw herself down, unconscious of what was passing around her, repeating again and again:

"A Jew! A Jew!"

One would have supposed that she could not believe it; that it was almost an impossibility.

"He!" she continued, "he, a Jew!"

In her bewilderment, a feeling of intense repulsion was the first of which she became really cognizant. The entire legend of the Passion passed through her troubled brain in a sort of feverish vision. The image of Pierre successively took the form of each of our Saviour's persecutors. She beheld him foremost in the ranks of those who demanded His condemnation of Pontius Pilate. It was he who scourged the Son of God; he who crowned him with thorns; who nailed

Him to the cross; who raised to His lips the sponge dipped in vinegar; who finally pierced His side with a lance. In this young man whom she had treated with confiding friendship only that morning, she now saw the murderer of Christ. It was he who had done it all.

After a time, she regained some control over herself, and a feeling of astonishment succeeded this sad reverie. She could not be mistaken. It was certain and evident that she was suffering keen mental anguish. But why?

She became suddenly terrified. Could it be that without her knowledge, and against her will, this stranger, this transient guest, this man who did not even belong to the same sphere in which she moved, had inspired her with a much deeper liking than she had supposed?

"No," she responded in an outburst of passionate revolt, "no, it is impossible!"

But in that case what difference would it make to her whether Pierre was an Israelite or a Christian? In that case, why should she experience this agitation, this suffering, this repulsion, this shame—a secret but undeniable feeling of shame.

This time, she left the question unanswered; and no longer daring to interrogate herself, she yielded to an impulse of anger which served as a means of escape as it were.

"I am mad!" she exclaimed. "What is it to me, if he is a Jew?"

A moment afterwards she was in the vegetable garden, repeating orders which the gardener had already received from her; then she hastened to the stables, plucking flowers on her way, flowers at which she did not even glance before throwing them down on the gravel walk. She caressed the horse she was accustomed to ride, with an abstracted air; pulled the ears of the dogs that were leaping upon her skirts, after which she returned to the château.

Both salons were deserted, but through a window she saw a group of new-comers, neighbors who had been invited to engage in a game of croquet. Pierre was leading the game, to all appearance, light-hearted and happy, chatting pleasantly with his companions who answered him in the same tone.

Louise forgot herself a moment in watching him; then, leaving the window, she opened the piano, and began to sing from memory with a strange expression of which she finally became conscious herself; whereupon she seized the first book she happened to see and started for her own room.

To reach it, she was obliged to pass through the large drawing-room in one corner of which, under a silken curtain, stood the artist's easel upon which rested the unfinished portrait.

The girl stopped short. The blood rushed to her heart, and as she stood there, pale and trembling, she was seized with a savage longing to tear up the sketch or blur the colors; but she lacked the necessary courage.

Then, overwhelmed by a despair as irresistible as it was inexplicable, she rushed up stairs, and running into her own room, locked the door behind her.

Her seat at the dinner table was vacant.

"Louise has a slight headache," the baroness said, by way of excuse, and no one seemed to think any more about it.

The next morning, at the hour of the sitting, as Pierre was preparing his palette, the baroness came to him, and said:

"My dear sir, my daughter will give you leave of absence this morning."

"Is she still indisposed?" inquired the young man.

"No; a trifle fatigued, that is all."

Then she added, with mischievous good-nature:

"I fear there is a little vanity at the bottom of it. She did not sleep well last night, and she perhaps thinks that she does not look well enough to sit."

By one of those sudden intuitions that come from one knows not where, Pierre instantly divined that this was merely a pretext; though not on the part of the baroness, who was evidently sincere and who had only repeated what her daughter had said to her; but he showed no signs of emotion though in his secret heart he was deeply wounded.

"How have I offended her?" he wondered artlessly.

Louise came down to dinner, but she scarcely returned the artist's bow. The fact was noticed; and seeing that she continued to ignore the young man's

presence during the hours that followed, and that she avoided answering him by pretending not to hear his remarks, her father said to her:

"What has M. Wavre done to offend you?"

"Offend me?" she replied in pretended astonishment. "Nothing. Why do you ask such a question?"

"Because you are treating him very rudely. The fact is apparent to every one. Look, your mother is beckoning to you; she, too, probably desires to speak to you on the subject."

In fact, the change in the girl's manner had struck every one from the canon to Abbé Lahoulotte, and all united in censuring her.

"It is not his fault that he was born a Jew!" they exclaimed.

"Besides this is not the first time we have entertained guests of his faith here," added the baron. "Among the faithful supporters of the fallen dynasty there were at least half a dozen who held exalted positions, and who were received at the château without any show of displeasure on her part."

The baroness was even more severe. To her, a determined Royalist, the requirements of religion were not of paramount importance by any means; the main thing after all, even if one must run a risk of losing one's chance of Paradise, was to appear well-bred; and nothing could be more ill-bred than to treat people rudely in one's own house.

So, without resorting to any circumlocution, she

administered such a stinging rebuke to her daughter that Louise was absolutely thunderstruck.

She had not supposed she was carrying things so far as to excite the disapproval of any one; such, certainly had not been her intention, but if she had so greatly transgressed the laws of politeness, she was rather inclined to be glad of it on some accounts, for since her parents had reproved her, it was more than probable that the young artist must also have noticed the coolness of her manner towards him. So much gained! And in this, there was some compensation for the rebukes she had received.

So she spoke to Pierre as she was bidden; but each word held a covert sting in spite of the sweet smile that accompanied every remark she made to the poor fellow.

Poor fellow, indeed, for he fully understood the intentions of Louise, and being too much of a gentleman to retort, he forced himself to reply politely. But what an effort it cost him! He was almost heartbroken, and more than once he was obliged to exert his will to the uttermost to keep from betraying his feelings.

But as this cruel sport continued, sorrow gave place to anger.

Intoxicated, perhaps, by her easy triumph over an adversary who considered it a duty not to defend himself, Louise accepted his arm to pass into the drawing room, an imperious look from her mother having commanded her to do so.

"You seem rather gloomy," she remarked. "Are you angry with me?"

"Angry with you?" repeated Pierre. "I am never angry with children."

During the remainder of the evening, Madame de Bovilliers engrossed the attention of the young man, so there was no further intercourse, either direct or indirect, between him and Louise.

Just as tea was brought in, the baroness seated herself at the piano, and requested the artist to turn the pages of her music for her. When she had finished, Pierre remained near the instrument looking over the music. He was not in a very amiable mood, and this occupation gave him an excuse for remaining a little apart from the others and avoiding attention. Occasionally, with his left hand, he struck a few notes as if to recall the air of the song he was glancing over.

Louise approached him.

"So you possess every accomplishment," she said recklessly. "Do you sing?"

"When I am alone, Mademoiselle."

"Mamma," cried the young girl, "will you beg M. Wavre to favor us with something?"

There was no chance of escape, and she confidently expected to embarrass him; but he responded to her malicious glance with a disdainful smile, and in compliance with the request of the baroness, seated himself at the instrument with the ease and composure of a person who has no desire to be urged. He under-

stood music thoroughly, and managed a voice of a rather low register but which was nevertheless very melodious and sympathetic, with great taste and skill.

He sang, and in spite of herself, Louise was obliged to yield to the penetrating charm of the impassioned accents whose depth of expression seemed increased by the easy emission of the sounds. What did he sing? I do not know; but what can one sing of, if not of love? An eternal theme, of which one never tires, and in which each composer finds inexhaustible food for inspiration.

Before the song ended, Mlle. de Bovilliers rose and left the room. Pierre was somehow conscious of this, though he did not see her disappear, and the fact strengthened him in the belief that she had been actuated by a hostile motive in compelling him to sing. Perhaps she had hoped he would display a want of ability, or in other words, render himself ridiculous; and perhaps she experienced some annoyance at being disappointed in this respect.

Deeply wounded by the manner in which she had treated him, Pierre scarcely heard the compliments that were lavished upon him when the song ended; and it was with no little impatience that he awaited the moment for retiring to his own room.

He was eager to reflect, to see clearly into his own heart. But when he had returned to his chamber, and was at liberty to reflect upon what was passing in and around him, a feeling of weariness and discouragement

seized him. What was the use of subjecting himself to a rigid cross-examination? What did the cause of all this matter to him? What was the whole family to him, for that matter? And if Mlle. de Bovilliers was the most capricious and whimsical of young ladies, why so much the worse for her, that was all.

He would trouble himself no more about it; he would not allow his mind to dwell upon it. What was the use of paying so much attention to an ill-bred and capricious child?

Soon, he would return to Paris, and plunge once more into the old current, in which the memory of Louise would certainly not trouble him long.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, "let us think of something else. I shall never see her again!"

He had great control over himself, for he possessed the firmness of will which one generally meets in those who, springing from nothing, have fought their battles and come off victorious almost without assistance. So this resolve once made, he felt sufficiently relieved to fall asleep as soon as he had extinguished his light.

CHAPTER IX.

A RECONCILIATION.

THE following morning Pierre woke in the best humor imaginable just as the clock was striking seven; but the inmates of the château were essentially Parisian in their habits, that is to say, they did not rise until late, and no one was visible before breakfast.

But Pierre hastily dressed himself and crept cautiously down stairs and out into the garden, where everything was sparkling with the warm dew of early autumn. The grounds seemed contracted to the young artist, and absorbed in a reverie in which he was incapable of following any one idea to the end, and inhaling the fresh air with delight, he hastened on until he reached the open fields; then, suddenly retracing his steps, he soon regained the château, and entered the salon.

Louise was seated near the easel.

"I have been waiting for you," she remarked, on seeing him.

"Waiting for me?" repeated Pierre in surprise.

"Yes, for I have an apology to make."

"What an idea! And for what, pray? Notice that I at least do not demand any."

"I know that very well. Possibly that is the reason I feel inclined to make it."

"Pray do not take the trouble, Mademoiselle."

"Still, I have offended you."

"I suspected you of an intention to do so, perhaps," replied Pierre laughing, "but even if I did, I did not choose to notice it."

She made an impatient movement, whereupon the young man continued with a smile:

"Let us be frank, since you have insisted upon an explanation. Your indisposition was only a pretext. I am a child of Israel, hence your disdain. I am a Jew, and by reason of your education, I inspire you with a repulsion bordering on loathing. You reduce me to despair," he added in the same half-taunting tone, "still, you will, I am sure, pardon me, if I feel a little surprise. May I be allowed to ask in what way my religion concerns you? I am not numbered among the friends of the family. Summoned here to perform work for which I am to be paid, I am merely a casual guest in the eyes of your family and especially of yourself. If I perform my work satisfactorily, that is all any one has a right to expect; and even if I worshipped Vishnu or the Sacred Ox instead of believing in a single God, no one would have a right to take offence. It would certainly be strange to require me to be baptized in order to deserve the confidence that is accorded to my very humble skill. It is true that I am now under your roof; but I did not solicit the honor, and

had there been a decent inn in the village I should have much preferred to take up my abode there. I should at least have been spared the mortification of shocking and scandalizing you, sorely against my will, I assure you."

Louise heard him to the end without evincing the slightest desire to interrupt him.

When he paused, she rose, and coming towards him, said:

"I was wrong. Will you forget it, and give me your hand?"

"No, Mademoiselle."

She looked him full in the face.

"No?" she repeated.

"I am conscious of my unworthiness," replied Pierre, "and such being the case, it must be a matter of perfect indifference to all of you whether you have, or have not wronged me. It should be enough that I profess for you, Mademoiselle, the most profound respect. Besides," he added, without giving her time to reply, "my sketches are completed, and I am going away."

"You are going away?" repeated Louise, in something very like consternation.

"This afternoon, Mademoiselle."

The girl's brows suddenly contracted.

"Very well," she exclaimed with intense vehemence of manner, "go then, since you have so much pride!"

"Pride, me?"

"Yes, pride! A pride so paltry in its nature that you can not forgive my prejudice when I admit its injustice. I yielded to it thoughtlessly, without reflection; I reproach myself, and beg you to forgive me, and you harshly repulse me. You are cruel and ungenerous. I heartily repent of my good resolution. You may go."

And she started resolutely towards the door.

Pierre intercepted her. He was very pale and trembled visibly.

"Take a seat there," he said, pointing to her accustomed place. "I shall go when your portrait is finished."

"Not unless you give me your hand," she replied with strange obstinacy.

He hesitated, then, moved to the depths of his soul, he extended his hand which she eagerly seized, casting upon him a glance eloquent with unspeakable joy.

What passed through his mind at that moment? There are some emotions that defy analysis; but a nervous throb contracted his throat, and sinking into a chair, he buried his face in his hands.

"Ah!" he exclaimed in despairing tones, "Why did I ever come here? What unlucky chance sent me?"

Panting with emotion she watched him, enjoying her triumph with a mixture of feminine coquetry, and secret tenderness. She experienced no desire to analyze her feelings; this unexpected pleasure was too delightful to be relinquished. It was the supreme hap-

piness of a woman who is beloved, who can no longer doubt it and who exults in her victory, a victory all the more complete in this case, since Pierre had acknowledged himself vanquished without any betrayal of her personal feelings.

The sound of approaching footsteps made her start.

"Dry your eyes," she said quickly. "Some one is coming."

It was the lady companion. When she crossed the threshold she saw Pierre bending over his easel, while Louise was posing in the most composed manner imaginable, though her face was radiant.

What a delightful day it was for both of them! Never had the sky appeared so blue! Never had they found the landscape so marvellously picturesque! What a lovely and blissful day!

In the evening, in the drawing-room, they were entreated to find a duet to sing together. Together they turned over the sheets of music in the portfolios, the tips of their fingers occasionally grazing each other, their hair almost touching. At last, the piece was selected, and they craved the indulgence of the company as they had never practised together. But how unnecessary such a precaution was, when they sang so enchantingly, pleading, entreating and responding to each other with all the fervor and abandon of mutual love.

At midnight, the party separated.

Louise on entering her chamber, wandered about

aimlessly here and there. Once, she caught a glimpse of herself in the glass, and the radiance of her face startled her. Her eyes were sparkling with a candid happiness that suddenly set her to reflecting. Sinking into an arm-chair, she reviewed, one by one, the events of this blissful day, and soon a terrible anguish completely changed her whole current of thought.

As we have said before, Louise possessed unusual strength of character; she was a person who always looked the situation full in the face and who scorned subterfuge; and on so grave an occasion as this, she could not fail to be honest with herself. So, on resolutely examining her own heart, she found that instead of exulting, she had good cause to deplore her defeat, since she had been unable to defend herself against the love which the young artist had inspired in defiance of the wills of both.

Love? So it was true that she loved him! How could she doubt it? A feeling of shame suffocated her; a strange shame against which some instinct of independence and of good sense urged her to struggle. Buried in an arm-chair beside the open window, she sat with her eyes fixed on the silent immensity of a firmament whose eternal, overpowering peacefulness contrasted strangely with the tempest that was raging in her soul.

In a sort of philosophical bewilderment, she asked herself what were the prejudices, scruples and beliefs of a poor girl in comparison with this illimitable space,

and these hosts of shining stars? What could it matter in such a universe and above all to Him who had created it, that there was one spot of earth on which a Christian loved an Israelite? Was it likely that He, in his infinite majesty, aye, and in his supreme indifference, would even deign to perceive it? Suddenly, a strange light seemed to burst upon her mental vision. All that she had been taught, the entire foundation of her faith suddenly crumbled away, leaving her dazzled and overwhelmed by the marvellous discoveries which transported her with joy, and which revealed life under an entirely different aspect. The emotion she experienced was one of deliverance and enfranchisement; she felt, indeed, that she had been blind up to the present time, and her heart now throbbed with joy on beholding the new dawn. Like Saint Paul, she was pursuing the road to Damascus; but instead of casting herself trembling and terrified, face downwards into the dust, she gazed unflinchingly up to Heaven, striving to fathom the immensity of space with hungry eyes, as if searching for the true God who reigns there in sovereign compassion and infinite mercy.

Time passed unheeded, as she sat there absorbed in thought. Unmindful of all mundane things, her charmed imagination soared through the starry sky, losing itself in blissful dreams to which the gentle murmur of the breeze formed a fitting accompaniment.

At last, a distant clock struck four. The sound aroused her from her reverie, and reminded her of the

necessity of going to bed; but the movement she made in rising caused intense pain in every limb. The prolonged ecstacy into which she had fallen, had benumbed her, and she was perishing with cold.

Bah! at the age of twenty, in a closed room under silken coverlets, one soon regains warmth and suppleness! She closed the window, drew the curtains, undressed in a moment, and resuming her dream, fell asleep.

The next morning she awoke with a headache. Her skin was hot, and her pulse rapid. She coughed two or three times, and the physician who was summoned said gravely:

"She needs attention."

It was an attack of bronchitis, complicated by a brain-fever which soon developed itself.

The consternation of the family pointed out to each guest the course it was advisable for him to pursue. The canon alone evinced a decided reluctance to depart. Were his secret hopes to be thus frustrated?

Nevertheless, he too, was obliged to pack his trunk and strap it for departure.

Two days afterwards there remained at the château only the baron and baroness who were speedily joined, after the sending of a telegram, by Louise's brother, Lieutenant Vaconsin, who adored his sister.

CHAPTER X.

A NEW STAR IN THE RELIGIOUS FIRMAMENT.

THE Lenten services of the following year were unusually interesting in Paris. There were signs of a political reaction that stimulated the zeal of all right-minded, conservative citizens; and certain sayings repeated first in drawing-rooms, and afterwards in the newspapers, had imparted courage and confidence to the most timid. A certain "Unto the End" was one of them; the "Here I am; here I shall remain," had been paraphrased by several leaders; and people who believed neither in God nor Devil made it a rule to go in gorgeous attire to yawn through the sermons that were preached in all the parish churches of the city. So the attendance was large, as well as select, and a great deal of money was collected. A most fortunate time for the manufacturers and renters of chairs.

At the Madeleine, crowds of people were turned away, and such people! Many of them elegantly attired ladies who, as they descended the steps, inadvertently of course, displayed a dainty ankle to the crowd of admiring swells on the pavement below. The cause of the Madeleine's extraordinary popularity was due to the fact that a star of the first magnitude was

shining there; a priest whose boldness of speech would have caused his arrest elsewhere, and who displayed in his sermons a vehemence and wit that compelled his auditors to applaud, in spite of the respect due to the sacred place. That this man was manifestly inspired by the Holy Spirit each of his auditors agreed. And then he was such a handsome man! Such a superb head, such brilliant eyes and such a magnificent physique!

"Who is he?" inquired strangers.

"Abbé Rémondat. Do you not know him?"

"No. I belong to Saint Roche."

"My dear friend, forsake Saint Roche. There is no one there to compare with him."

In short, the ambitious canon had made a hit, and was as much the fashion as Capoul and Patti. He had developed into a leader, nothing more or less: a celebrity, whom the Barnums of free and sensation-loving America regretted their inability to entice upon a bridge of gold to go and perform on the other side of the ocean.

He was pleased, undoubtedly, for whatever people may say or think, there is a human heart under every priest's robe, and no man can long remain insensible to the pleasures of success.

Still, it was not triumphs of this kind which he would have chosen, could he have had his way, for irreproachable as was his demeanor, no priest ever had less taste for his vocation; no priest had ever regretted more deeply his adoption of this profession!

He had been virtually compelled to enter the priesthood by a series of unfortunate circumstances which it might be well to explain.

The youngest child of a very worthy woman who had previously given birth to six daughters, he had only heard people speak of his father, a president of the council of Anjou, who had died during one of the sessions of that body.

The mother, one of those fiery and resolute Auvergnates whom reason never subdues, formed as soon as she became a widow, a very simple plan which she pursued for twenty years with a tenacity which brooked no opposition.

Realizing that destiny would compel her to marry off her six daughters, and consequently to deprive herself of their companionship for the sake of strangers for whom she would care nothing, and who would necessarily yield her only a very slight affection in return, she told herself that in order to make sure of not spending her last years in solitude and obscurity, her son must be bound to celibacy. Now the only means of imposing such an obligation upon him was to make him take orders. In such a case, under the patronage of family friends and relations who had held honorable positions under all the régimes, he could not fail to be appointed to an excellent curacy, where she would install herself with him. There, she could rule with a high hand, and enjoy a delightful and well deserved season of repose.

As soon as the lad arrived at a suitable age she sent him to the nearest seminary. For some time the boy accepted the lot that had been marked out for him without any great repugnance; but when the period of adolescence transformed him, awakening aspirations, instincts and desires in proportion to the vigor of his blood and of his intellect, he found it difficult to submit to the yoke of the institution. There were constant revolts over which his will never succeeded in winning a victory; mental conflicts in which the powers of evil always gained the ascendancy.

He tried to persuade his mother that he was not constituted for the priesthood; and endowed by nature with no little eloquence, he presented good reasons in plenty, freely confessing the weaknesses which he declared himself incapable of overcoming. Wasted labor! The widow, determined that her son should not thwart her, resolutely closed her ears, and without troubling herself to find arguments, reduced the wretched youth to subjection by persistently refusing to listen.

To escape from the sacrifice demanded of him, he resorted to every possible expedient, the least original of which was an attempt to make the professors of the institution expel him. But, alas! he soon discovered that he would not succeed in this. They too, were firmly resolved that he should enter their ranks. What! relinquish their hold on such a clever youth who was endowed with intellectual faculties of the highest order,

and who promised to be an honor to the priesthood? Release this rare prize at a time when recruits were not only few in number but gathered chiefly from the peasantry, and consequently only worthy to swell the number of humble disciples whose only mission was to say Amen to all that was uttered by those above them.

One day, exasperated beyond endurance, he fled from the seminary, cast aside his monkish garb, and put many miles between himself and his mother; but he was only nineteen, and lacked what is commonly known as the *sinews of war*, the necessary funds to carry on a prolonged resistance. The widow did not hesitate for a moment. Strong in her rights as a guardian, she set the police on the fugitive's track, and they soon captured him. A heart-rending scene ensued. The young man attacked her at every point; sometimes entreating her with despairing sobs to have compassion on him; sometimes breaking out into open revolt. But neither had any effect upon her. The good lady had sworn that her son should become a priest and nothing could induce her to break that vow.

At last, the unfortunate youth abandoned the struggle and became resigned, at least in appearance; but if his mother could have read his secret heart she would have been so terrified that she certainly would have renounced her cruel design. Weary of the interminable discussions that rent his heart in twain, the youth formed a half-diabolical resolution. No longer able to

doubt the selfishness of his mother's motives, he acquiesced from a fear of an open scandal, but with a longing for revenge that destroyed every particle of filial affection.

"She wishes me to be a priest," he said to himself, "so be it. But on the day when she thinks that her triumph has come, she shall see what her iniquitous schemes have cost her."

"You wish me to enter the priesthood," he said dryly to his obstinate parent. "I submit. This evening I shall return to the seminary."

He did, indeed, return, and from that time, the good fathers were touched and edified by the industry he displayed, and by his evident anxiety to understand all that was taught him.

At the age of twenty-one he was admitted to orders. His mother spent the entire day in returning thanks to the Most High, and overwhelmed with joy, believed that she had entered the desired haven at last.

But her delight was of short duration. Only a few days passed before the young man announced his intention to become a missionary.

"What, go away?"

"Yes, to distant lands. To Oceanica, Cochin China, or Japan, it mattered not where."

"But what is to become of me?" inquired the mother.

"You, mother? You wished me to consecrate myself to the service of God; I obeyed you. Rejoice, then."

Even his superiors endeavored to dissuade him, but he paid no attention to their remonstrances. Going straight to his bishop, he talked to him in such a convincing manner that this prelate at once took sides with him, and reproved the widow quite sternly, who saw the very persons she had made use of in subjugating her son, interesting themselves in inducing him to desert her.

But as her son had yielded to her tears on one occasion, she did not yet despair of shaking his resolution. But alas! what a change had taken place in him! He was no longer the tender-hearted youth who could not endure the sight of his mother's grief, but the anointed of God, a being elevated far above all the petty sorrows of humanity.

To such as appealed to his filial tenderness, he replied gently but with characteristic firmness:

"The sorrow I feel in grieving the mother who bore me, is a sacrifice I humbly offer to the Trinity. My mother suffers, and I am the cause of it; this makes me experience a sort of martyrdom. So much the better. I bear it for the sake of Jesus, whose glorification must henceforth be my only object in life.

"But she,—she," they repeated.

"She? She must go and prostrate herself at the foot of the altar, and there meditate upon the sorrows of our Holy Mother; and her own grief will seem so slight in comparison, that she will soon be consoled."

It is true that this solicitude was only pretended.

The filial affection upon which they depended, no longer existed. On the contrary, he hated this woman who had thought only of her own aggrandizement, and who had shrunk from nothing to bend him to her will. He did not even feel pity or compassion for her. In his eyes, she was a creature destitute of either sensibility or nobility of character; an inferior, unworthy of the slightest consideration.

As soon as the necessary arrangements could be made, he embarked for Saigon, contenting himself by announcing his departure to his widowed mother in a short letter abounding in scriptural texts of an appropriate character.

The blow killed her. Her disappointment was so intense that for six months the poor woman wept incessantly, marvelling that after all, Heaven, in its justice, should compel her to reap exactly what she had sown, and then she died.

When her son received this sad intelligence some months afterwards, he was not in a condition to experience any great remorse. The climate had proved exceedingly unwholesome to him, and when he received the news of his mother's death, he was prostrated by a fever which threatened to put an end to his own life.

He recovered, however; and as soon as he could walk with the aid of a cane in either hand, he returned to France, where his native air finally restored him to health.

But worst of all, the trials to which he had been

subjected, and his enforced meditations during convalescence, led him to regard things in an entirely different light, and the little faith he possessed was violently shaken. He regarded himself as a dupe, and cursed himself as a fool for having ruined his life out of a senseless respect for sentiments which are oftener feigned than felt. Would it not have been a hundred times better for him to have offended his mother by persisting in his refusal to return to the seminary, than to have obeyed her and then make her die of grief and disappointment? In that case, he would not now be tormented with a twofold and poignant regret as well as a sort of mental vertigo aggravated by secret promptings to self-destruction.

As he regained strength, the same aspirations and cravings which had once before impelled him to cast aside his cassock again seized him with almost irresistible power. The hardest thing of all to bear was the sight of his sisters' households. In each of these he beheld a man occupied, and how delightfully! with the prosperity of his family, content to spend and be spent in their service, and to live happy and beloved with a little band of grateful and confiding children around him, and with a contented and virtuous wife to protect. On leaving these firesides, sometimes, his reason almost deserted him. Through a mistaken sense of duty, he had deprived himself of all this happiness.

And what had he in the way of compensation? God? Was that certain? He began to ask himself this ques-

tion now, with a terror which his early training was powerless to dispel. Still, force of habit made him defer an examination, the result of which he instinctively dreaded. He endeavored to divert his thoughts from the subject, and envied certain older clerical brethren who had ceased to think, and who yawningly expounded doctrines of which they had but an extremely vague comprehension.

Alas! his twenty-six years did not permit him to follow their example, and indulge in that blissful indifference which is a refuge only for the aged, or for minds of an emphatically second-rate order; and this constant and overpowering realization of the void in his life impelled him irresistibly to devote himself to something. But to what?

Even under these conditions it would seem that life might still have a claim and an object. For domestic joys he might substitute ambition, for instance. The pursuit of a possible triumph might furnish a vent for his energy and a field for his efforts, at least, he hoped so. The result had proved the correctness of this supposition, and his success had exceeded his most sanguine expectations.

As we have seen, some inexplicable motive had impelled him to make an effort to bring about a marriage between Count d'Aitignies and Louise de Boviliers; and had it not been for the young lady's illness, it is more than probable that the services of the family lawyer would have been called into requisition before

this time, in the preparation of the marriage contract, for in spite of that hindrance, the project had not been abandoned. Before taking her convalescent daughter to Cannes, Madame Vaconsin, *née* Bèlencour, had promised the canon to bring the affair to a successful termination; and from the letters that had been exchanged between them, spring-time would probably witness the conclusion of the affair.

In fact, towards the close of the Lenten season in which Abbé Rémondat was achieving such a wonderful success at the Madeleine, the baroness announced the return of her family to Paris. Louise had entirely recovered. Influenced by her mother, she no longer evinced any unwillingness to become the Countess Godefroy d'Aitignies. The baron, alone, seemed to be not altogether satisfied with his proposed son-in-law. The count's four hundred thousand francs seemed to him rather insignificant in comparison with the million and a half Louise was to receive as a dowry; but the baroness pleased at the idea of wedding her daughter to a nobleman of ancient lineage, a legitimist by right of birth, and a good Catholic, had promised to overcome these objections.

The preliminaries thus settled to all intents and purposes, the canon deemed it advisable to warn Godefroy; and one morning, on leaving for the Madeleine, he ordered the coachman to stop at the residence of the young man he was pleased to style his spiritual son.

CHAPTER XI.

"THE VERY HUSBAND I WOULD HAVE SELECTED FOR YOU."

COUNT GODEFROY D'AITIGNIES occupied a handsome suite of bachelor apartments on the Rue d'Aumale. The salon and dining-room were on the street; the bedroom and the study, so called, though it would be difficult to explain why, overlooked the gardens that extended as far as the houses on the Rue la Rochefoucault.

The furniture was slightly worn, but still presented an eminently respectable appearance. One instinctively felt that comfort was a paramount consideration with its owner. The chairs were soft, and low arm-chairs predominated. Locomotion in the bedroom was difficult, so greatly was it encumbered with reclining chairs, *causeuses* and ottomans of different sizes. Every window was hung with thick curtains which fell to the floor in heavy folds, softening the light, and deadening the sounds from without. It was a peaceful and half-voluptuous abode, the atmosphere of which, impregnated with a mingled odor of musk and rice powder, made one fancy one's self in a lady's boudoir, in spite of the partially consumed cigars that strewed their white ashes in cups of bronze, Saxe and Sèvres.

Evidently the count was not anticipating a visit from the canon; and it was equally evident that the announcement of the guest's arrival did not arouse much pleasure, for his valet having been obliged to shake the count in order to awaken him, Godefroy could not refrain from mentally consigning the importunate visitor to the lower regions.

"Why were you so stupid as not to think of telling him I had gone out? I could have called on him soon. You are certainly an idiot."

Then summoning courage to endure his misfortune, he added:

"Tell him I have a headache, and that I beg he will wait a moment. What time is it?"

"Half past twelve."

"Bring me a little warm water, quick. Give him the morning papers. What could have sent him here to rout me out at this hour!"

The young man's annoyance was not unreasonable. The afternoon before, there had been races at Longschamps, the first spring meeting, and as you may suppose, no gentleman of his stamp would have failed to be present. With his badge of membership hanging from his button hole, he had been foremost among the crowd, where he had made bets with people to whom he would not have bowed for an empire any where outside of this enclosure. He had even won about four hundred louis from them, a fact which put him in remarkably good humor.

"I am in luck to-day," he said to himself exultantly.

After the races, he had returned in company with some members of his club, with whom he talked in the most familiar manner, though he did not even know their place of residence. But there was no one at the club-house, a majority of the gentlemen having been unable to escape the bore of a family dinner that day; so one of his companions suggested dining at a neighboring restaurant in company with some pretty girls he promised to pick up.

The plan was promptly acceded to; and at half past seven Godefroy was attacking his oysters in company with two lady frequenters of restaurants, who, though neither attractive nor pretty, were certainly entitled to respect by reason of age, for there are several retired generals who can testify to having treated these same ladies long ago, in the days when they were pursuing their military studies at Saint-Cyr. To tell the truth, such ladies understand their business very well, and are not at all troublesome. Entirely devoted to the education of youth, they discreetly withdraw immediately after coffee is served, understanding very well that their entertainers will desire to engage in a game of baccarat.

This was the case after the conclusion of the dinner to which they had been invited by Godefroy and his friend. As we have said, Count d'Aitignies felt that he had struck a vein of luck that day, so it was he who proposed a game; but strange to say, his good fortune

had deserted him, and in a very short time he lost all he had won at the races. This disappointment turned his head: he wished to show his pluck, and at three o'clock in the morning he found himself head over heels in debt.

Some men would have been satisfied to let the affair rest there, and would have gone to bed, but he was incapable of it. So deserting the company, he returned to the club, where he finally recovered his money.

But it was nine o'clock in the morning before he succeeded in doing so.

His complexion was livid, his eyes were red and swollen, his bones ached, and he could scarcely see when he parted from his companions to go to bed, after a compulsory toilet which delayed him until after ten o'clock. And now this confounded priest had come to disturb him at half past twelve.

"The devil take him!" he exclaimed, as he hastily donned the garments scattered on the surrounding chairs. "What if he should have taken a notion to compel me to swallow a sermon. That would really be the last straw. I like him very well but that is no reason why he should make himself a nuisance."

If the Bovilliers family had seen the Count d'Aitignies in this guise, they would have gazed at him in open-mouthed astonishment, so little did he resemble the rather diffident youth they had entertained the previous autumn. Still less would they have believed it possible that it was he who was expressing himself in this forcible, but by no means elegant language.

His toilet made, Godefroy hastened to join the abbé.

"My dear boy," began the canon, "the Bovilliers have returned to Paris, and we are to dine with them this evening."

"The deuce! I have an engagement," was the young man's reply.

"Then you must manage to obtain a release from it. The letters which have passed between the baroness and myself make it necessary to settle this affair immediately. Louise, persuaded by her mother, has consented to become your wife; and the baron, who, at one time considered your fortune insufficient, has concluded to overlook that objection. The provisions of the marriage contract are all that remains to be decided. Give yourself no uneasiness; I will take charge of them; and will make such arrangements that, in case of your wife's death, you will be left in comfortable circumstances."

This was an eminently satisfactory assurance to Godefroy; still, he was haunted by one misgiving of a very serious character. To conclude this marriage, it was necessary for him to be able to show what he was supposed to possess, viz.: four hundred thousand francs, the fortune he had inherited from his deceased mother. A very easy condition to fulfil, if the money had still been in his possession. But alas, little was left him now save the recollection of it. He had spent it to the very last penny; and had aggravated the situation by borrowing about one third as much more—one hundred

and thirty thousand francs in round numbers, not including the interest. And what a terrible thing the interest was! How it mounted up month after month, continually increased by contingent expenses or fees upon which the notary and the sheriffs grew fat.

"Let me see," said the canon, to whom the lineal descendant of the Counts d'Aitignies had not considered it prudent to confess his embarrassment, "your inheritance is intact, I suppose? You still have the four hundred thousand francs you received from your mother."

"I have," replied the young man boldly.

Some might have been so conscientious as to consider this a falsehood; but Godefroy, who had been educated in one of the principal Jesuit seminaries, in accordance with Rémondat's wishes, had profited by the instructions of the good fathers, and now extricated himself from the difficulty without the slightest remorse, by means of one of those mental reservations which are the honor of such institutions.

It was only necessary to mentally add to the "I have" the words "spent them," to silence any scruples he might otherwise have felt. His protector had taught him that such a subterfuge was no falsehood. The end sanctified the means; and the canon certainly ought not to be offended with him for his deception, since a confession of the truth would have deeply pained this worthy priest who was trying to do him such a good turn.

Besides, Godefroy cherished a secret hope that everything might be arranged after all, for he had a devoted friend who had plenty of money at her disposal, and who would certainly take pleasure in extricating a worthy youth from his difficulties; and we shall see by and by, that he did not count without his host.

Reassured on this point, the canon did not stop to ask any more questions, but contenting himself with some general recommendations, he left his protégé to hasten to the Madeleine, where a select audience was eagerly waiting for one of those edifying discourses with which this eloquent divine was accustomed to regale them.

No one was disappointed. Rémondat was at his best that day. He exhorted the assemblage with marvellous passion and fervor, indulging freely in illustrations calculated to harrow up the feelings and excite his audience to the highest pitch. His words cut like so many two-edged swords from which it was impossible to escape. He made even the indifferent tremble; it was impossible to repress a shudder, and many of the ladies were moved to tears when he described the doom of the transgressor.

Ah! what a wonderful man! And what a marvellously musical voice he possessed! How handsome he was, too! How graceful were his gestures, how distinguished his bearing! What a beautiful and powerful face, illumined by eyes whose searching light it was impossible to meet unflinchingly. Even the most modest of his female auditors wondered how old he was.

But as yet he had touched only upon trifles, mere bagatelles intended to prepare his audience for the doctrinal exposition which was to constitute the bulk of his sermon; and it was not until he had gained full control of his hearers that he soared to realms where few of his lady auditors were able to follow him. But what did that matter now? They were completely under the spell of his magnetic eloquence, and it would be most uncourteous under the circumstances, not to grant him a period of grace; besides, as he was liberally paid, he had no intention of denying his patrons the aid of his talents in the good fight.

Yes, and a terrible fight it was, just then, for an attempt to moderate the insatiable demands of the clergy was in progress, and the liberals did not hesitate to resist the pretended rights of the Vatican by the doctrine of individual and personal rights.

"We must pity these misguided men, my brothers," said the canon, "and entreat Heaven to forgive them, for in the words of Holy Writ, they certainly know not what they do.

"Where do they find any authority to limit the action of the Church, to resist its censure, its maternal guidance in every thing relating to life, to family discipline, to the habits of the customs of nations?

"The Church, my brothers, has but one rejoinder to make; one triumphant rejoinder before which all arguments vanish like smoke. The Church, scorning all discussion, says triumphantly, 'I am independent.'

"Yes, the Church is independent, and it is a forgetfulness of this fact which has weaned from her so many spirits formed to love her, which has revived persecutions of every sort against her, and is preparing for her in the immediate future, difficulties which she will overcome only because she is divine.

"To be independent, is to have no superior. It is for this reason that God is pre-eminently independent, and in like manner, the Church.

"Who is the superior of the Church. Is it France or England or Italy, or any other nation? No, none of these. The Church has an invisible head, Jesus Christ, and a visible head, the Pope, Christ's representative.

"The Church constitutes a half human, half divine body on earth. Composed of men, it lives among men. This is its human side. 'The Holy Spirit is its soul.' In the words of Saint Augustine: *Spiritus est anima ecclesiae.* This is its divine side.

"On account of its divinity," the speaker continued, "it is superior to any human power, to any temporal authority or to any civil society. The Church, intrusted with the guidance and instruction of all nations, consequently has a right to the respect and (impressively) to the *obedience* of all nations."*

In spite of the sacredness of the place, a murmur of admiration ran from one end of the nave to the other. After winning the favor of the ladies, he was striving

* Mgr. Fava, Bishop of Grenoble, 1879.

to please the noblemen and such aspiring *bourgeoises* as had accompanied their pious dames.

Then, in indignant tones, the orator demanded to know if the Church should descend from the lofty plane in which she moved, to notice the misguided nations which contested her independence and her superiority.

"Alas!" he exclaimed, "to accuse the Church of indifference is the height of ingratitude and injustice. Does she not continue to struggle valiantly to save from the abyss into which she seems about to plunge, this beautiful land of France, now so fallen, formerly so great."

A general movement was followed by a profound silence. Every one was conscious that the climax was fast approaching, that a terrible blow was about to fall upon the magnates and the institutions of the day, and all present hung breathless on the speaker's words.

"When at the cry, 'Dieu le veut!'" he continued with fanatical vehemence, "ninety thousand warriors, with the red cross on their breasts, and lance in hand, rose as one man to exterminate the Saracen, at the risk of death by loathsome diseases and formidable adversaries; when a king, to arrest the progress of the demoralizing doctrines of an apostate monk, plunged the nation into interminable wars, then France was truly great!

"And grand and superb she showed herself once more when, to stifle the discords produced by ridicu-

lous sects that threatened society at large with destruction, beacon-lights were kindled on every hill, and Charles IX., inspired by the great Catherine de Medicis, forever endeared, both of them, to the hearts of all true Christians by their courage and heroic faith, delivered the country in a single night of fifty thousand Huguenots!* But to-day, my brothers, to-day, alas!—"

And finding in this, a starting point for a bitter attack upon the hideous democratism and spirit of tolerance which now disfigured the beautiful land of France, he indulged in transparent allusions which converted enthusiasm into positive frenzy.

All this was expressed with remarkable talent and an extraordinary knowledge of effect; not a word too much, and occasional displays of reserve which impressed one even more than the gestures and the play of feature with which he emphasized his ringing words. An artist in his profession! One of those true artists who, without a shadow of conviction, govern the play of their nerves, so that at times the emotion they excite, overtakes them in a sort of return shock.

It was a great triumph for him, a pious triumph of course; but in the sacristy, two reporters pounced upon him in order to obtain material for the fabrication of a two column sketch of his life and habits. The more determined of the two, despairing of making him forget the reserve imposed by his robe and his pro-

* Abridged History in use in Ecclesiastical Schools.

fession, dogged his steps as cleverly as any detective could have done, in order that his journal might, on the morrow, have the good fortune of telling the only partially civilized world that the incomparable orator, at the close of the service had repaired in an unpretending hackney coach—say, was this not touching?—to the Avenue de l'Imperatrice, to the residence of the charming Baroness Vaconsin de Bovilliers, née de Bèlencour.

Strange to say, this assertion was true. At seven o'clock the abbé was paying his respects to Louise's mother, and shaking hands with the daughter who, still a little weary from her journey, had only partially risen from her seat to receive him.

The poor girl was greatly changed. Though as pretty as ever, it was in an entirely different style: she was sedately lovely now in her melancholy pallor, and much more quiet and reserved, though still smiling and affable.

On the priest's entrance, he found her conversing with Godefroy who, in compliance with Rémondat's instructions, had presented himself at an early hour. The first glance satisfied the abbé that matters were progressing satisfactorily, his protégé being treated by each member of the family with that familiarity which implies a tacit understanding upon a certain subject; in short, he was treated like one of the household, like a person who had become a member of the family.

Not that there was in any member of the party that

peculiar freedom so apt to result from the presence of a betrothed couple, nor was there any display of affection or tenderness; but on the part of the parents and the young girl alike, there was an apparent desire to suppress ceremoniousness. They were evidently persons who had fully decided on a certain carefully-considered project, without any enthusiasm, it is true, and without much delight, but simply with a mutual and cold acquiescence. There was something in all this of a rather official character, so to speak, that left the interested parties perfectly cool and collected. Were they satisfied? If so, they showed little signs of it; and one felt almost sure that if the marriage should be broken off from some cause or other, they would accept the situation very philosophically.

And in fact, the canon would have been the only really vexed and disappointed person. But this certainly was not likely to be the case. Far from apprehending any rupture, he was convinced that an eminently satisfactory conclusion had been reached.

The baroness strengthened him in this opinion. On taking his arm to enter the dining-room, she whispered:

"My dear Abbé, the baron wishes to see you a moment in his cabinet this evening, to confer with you on the principal stipulations of the marriage contract. You will only have to say 'Amen.' I have smoothed away all difficulties; and by listening to my husband, you will learn that your wishes have prevailed."

"I am infinitely grateful to you, baroness."

"You need not be. It was for our own sakes, and especially for my own, that I exerted myself to insure the success of this project. Your protégé, though perhaps not a young girl's ideal, satisfies other and more important requirements. With him, at least, my daughter is not likely to be exposed to those crises of the heart which are so wearing on a woman. She views things in a sensible light, and realizes that for her, position is more necessary than love. She also feels that with Godefroy she will have no sacrifice to make, and that she can retain her own individuality in their married life. As for me, I see this advantage, she will remain near us."

During the entire repast the baroness and the abbé kept up a low-toned conversation.

"There were two kinds of husbands that I specially dreaded for Louise," remarked Madame de Bovilliers. "First, the lover husband. The joys of a love-match are necessarily short-lived; and my daughter's character led me to dread the effect of the too frequent disappointments in unions of this kind. I know her well; and chagrin, injustice and the wounding of legitimate pride would perhaps impel her to open revolt. The other kind of husband I wished to avoid for her, was a man like her father, one of those selfish natures by which a person, no matter what talent she may possess, must allow herself to be absorbed, unless she violently resists, at the risk of

an open scandal. With Godefroy, Louise has nothing of this kind to fear: they will live side by side, like friends."

In fact, the understanding seemed to be general and complete; and when Baron Vaconsin held a short conference with the canon, only a single point was left unsettled: the date of the marriage. This must, of course, depend upon the rapidity of Louise's recovery.

Among those present at this family dinner was a handsome and manly young officer whom Godefroy had known only by hearsay: Lieutenant Vaconsin, the brother of the betrothed.

On introducing them, the baroness bade them shake hands; "for you are destined to become good friends," she remarked.

They obeyed with very good grace; but the contact of their fingers did not produce that current of sympathy which is so quickly and easily established between young men. On the contrary, each felt a slight repulsion; and in spite of the courteous words they exchanged, they were both conscious of the same feeling.

"He does not suit me," thought the lieutenant, while Godefroy inwardly exclaimed:

"A conceited ass."

Louise's brother, in fact, caused him no little annoyance at the table. He scarcely took his eyes off his future brother-in-law, but gazed at him intently, as if trying to read his inmost thoughts; and Godefroy,

not a little intimidated, mentally consigned him to regions never mentioned to ears polite.

As they drank their coffee in the drawing-room, they conversed together a few moments, and the mutual antipathy increased in violence. The son of the baroness detected about his companion an odor of pretended sanctity that excited his distrust, and almost convinced him that the count was an arrant hypocrite. How absurd it was to think of marrying his clever sister to this great simpleton, who repeated with all the assurance of egregious ignorance, the ready-made formulas which had been crammed into him.

Godefroy, on his part, was scandalized by the opinions the young officer expressed on certain subjects. Evidently Lieutenant Vaconsin did not share the opinions and beliefs of either of his parents. He spoke of Bonapartism with scorn and indignation; the pretensions of the Legitimists excited his derision, and from the manner in which he alluded to the clerical machinations which were then in progress, and by which an attempt was being made to undermine government institutions, it was very evident that the young man was no bigot.

All this seemed appalling to Godefroy, who, while he did not hesitate to lead a most dissipated life, transgress every commandment of God and of the church, and stoop to anything to procure money, could not understand how any one could dare to live without religion.

A little later in the evening the young officer took a seat by his sister.

"Louisette," he said in low tones, "is this a husband of your own choosing?"

She turned her pretty face towards him, and with a smile in which there was a tinge of mischief, replied by asking:

"What do you think of him?"

"His conversation is extremely edifying, no doubt," responded the young man.

"He consents to live with us eight months of the year," answered the girl. "Mamma assures me that he will not be troublesome, and papa considers him a very good fellow."

"Have you not dreamed of something different?"

"I have been properly trained, my dear Charles."

"I understand. But you know, Louise, that nothing is settled yet, and that I have a voice in the matter, so do not fear to let me understand your wishes."

"You are very kind, and I thank you for it," replied Louise. "But what does it matter whether it is this man or some other, provided his temper is good? I am not very exacting, so you need not be troubled if he does not fulfil your conception of my ideal. I have none, or rather I have discovered that mine is not likely to be realized. So let us allow the subject to drop. If you are not pleased, refrain from saying so, for my sake. Besides, who knows! There are always many surprises in marriage; and girls who

expect much are very apt to be disappointed; perhaps I, who expect nothing, shall be more fortunate. Besides, maternity furnishes one with interests and occupation. I experience neither enthusiasm nor repugnance; and go forward confidently to meet my fate with a peaceful heart and an unwavering confidence in the mercy of God."

"So be it," replied her brother.

As he was about to move away, he carelessly remarked:

"Tell me, how does your portrait come on?"

Louise turned suddenly pale, but after a successful struggle for composure, she quietly replied:

"You recollect that my illness prevented its completion. Why do you ask the question?"

"Because I dined with the artist day before yesterday."

"With Monsieur Wavre?" inquired the girl calmly, in spite of the emotion she experienced.

"Yes, in company with his brother-in-law, Colonel Morseux, who has just been attached to the Polytechnic School. A most agreeable man, this Monsieur Wavre, though apparently rather inclined to melancholy. An allusion to you made us friends at once."

Louise only smiled. Overcome with emotion, she no longer had strength to speak.

"A truly charming family," continued Charles Vaconsin. "How devoted they all are to each other, and what an affable and brilliant man the young artist is! He is a Jew, I believe."

"Yes, a Jew," replied the young girl, summoning all her courage in order to conceal her anguish.

"It is a pity, upon my word!"

"Why a pity?"

"Because he is the very husband I would have chosen for you, Louisette."

His sister pretended to recollect an order that must be given without delay, and rising suddenly, left the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XII.

ETIENNE GRELLA.

AT half past ten the canon and Godefroy left the Bovilliers' mansion. The former, delighted with the result that had been achieved, devoted himself, as they walked down the Avenue de l'Imperatrice, to the task of enumerating the advantages of the projected alliance to his spiritual son. But the latter, even while responding to these remarks, remained absorbed in anxious thought as to the best means of procuring the four hundred thousand francs that he must have in his possession when the hour for the signing of the marriage contract arrived. Where should he obtain them? How should he do it? To what saints, or rather, to what expedients should he have recourse? Of course he had considerable time before him; but if one dreads a day, it seems to be ever near. Besides, though it is easy for a man of fashion to squander four hundred thousand francs, it is terribly difficult for a man of fashion to regain four hundred thousand francs.

For this reason Godefroy listened to the abbé with divided attention. On reaching the Arc-de-Triomphe, they took a carriage.

"Where shall I set you down?" inquired the priest.

"It is not late," replied the young man. "I should like to see the last act of the ballet, at the Opera."

"Corner of the Rue Auber and the Boulevard," Rémondat said to the coachman.

Then, turning to Godefroy, he remarked:

"You understand that it would not be seemly for me to be seen accompanying you to these places of perdition."

In spite of his pre-occupation, his companion laughed heartily.

"Ah, if you but knew how delightful these places of perdition are!" he exclaimed.

But in going to the Opera, Godefroy was not influenced entirely by a desire for amusement.

The house was crowded that evening. The staircase de Garnier was lined as usual with a crowd of Englishmen in travelling costume, and provincials attired as for a wedding. Besides, as Godefroy had said, the performance was to conclude with a ballet, and consequently every regular subscriber occupied his arm-chair. It was the same ballet undoubtedly, danced by the same *figurantes* to a never ending waltz, to which no one ever listens; but on the other hand, it is always the same opera, sung by the same stars, to music to which the habitués no longer listen; and as it is the fashion to attend the ballet, there was not a vacant seat. And if you ask me why it is the fashion, I shall be obliged to reply that I cannot tell, for to me the performance is inexpressibly tiresome.

As has been remarked before, the hall was filled to overflowing; but Godefroy did not trouble himself

about that, but slowly ascended the famous staircase and made his way to a box in the first tier, in the little salon connected with which, several overcoats were hanging, and a lovely pelisse lined with blue-fox had been thrown carelessly down upon a small divan near the door. He, in turn removed his overcoat, hung it up, and selecting a conserve from a package of bon-bons that lay on a little table, he entered the box.

On hearing the portière lifted, a lady seated in the front of the box, turned her head, extended a tiny hand encased to the elbow in a black kid glove, and responded to his bow with a little familiar and friendly nod.

Two gentlemen were keeping her company, both in the toilet last decreed by fashion; not a particle of watch chain visible, and barehanded.

For you know as well as I do, that it is the height of vulgarity now, for a gentleman to wear gloves at the opera, or to allow any one to catch a glimpse of a single link of his watch chain. Why? You will perhaps inquire again, and I shall again be obliged to reply that I do not know, though I fancy this new decree is a sort of protest against the encroachments of the parvenues of the day. Probably the *elite* fancy these nobodies will invariably glove themselves carefully before appearing in public in order to conceal the coarseness of their hands, and that they will likewise neglect no opportunity to display a massive watch chain; so real gentlemen, the sons of bankers, real

estate agents, speculators, former foremen in factories now become manufacturers, and other representatives of the true aristocracy, have decided to distinguish themselves from well-to-do plebeians by affecting a carelessness of attire which will enable them to recognize each other at a glance.

The two gentlemen Godefroy found in the box would not have put on their gloves for all the money in the world.

One, a young man with a rather prepossessing face, genial voice and boyish air, certainly had not attained his majority, in spite of the blonde beard that adorned his chin. The greatest dunce in all the schools he had attended, he made up for his ignorance by a remarkable command of language and a loquacity full of genuine wit and clever repartee.

He was the son, and the only son, of a grocer who had conceived the brilliant idea of opening, in different parts of the city, twenty or thirty provision stores where one could purchase anything one desired from *sauer-kraut* to live lobsters, from prunes and bananas to salt herrings; in short, everything on the face of the earth that one could cook, chew or drink, all at the lowest price, and delivered at your door by sixty wagons drawn by superb Percheron horses, driven at a swift trot by coachmen direct from London. The result had been a revolution in trade.

But though the grocer had become immensely rich, he did not neglect his business and did not hesitate to

visit the markets himself even now, when he desired to obtain a choice lot of goods for his patrons.

With the son, it was quite different. Bitterly ashamed of his father's vocation, he led the life of a prince, in company with all sorts of people who ridiculed him unmercifully on account of his father's business, and who pretended to be doing him a very great favor by tolerating him in their midst.

He would willingly have given his right hand to induce his worthy parent to retire from business and cease to inundate the town with glaring advertisements in which his name appeared in gigantic letters. Ah! his father's name! A terrible spectre, it glared at him from the fourth page of all the papers. Men, stationed on the corners of the street forced it into his hands, at the head of notices. He saw it flaming in red, green, blue, yellow and purple posters in the waiting-rooms of the railway stations, in horse-cars, omnibuses and steamboats. The unfortunate youth could not even lift his eyes to heaven without seeing that diabolical name in gigantic letters between two chimneys.

Had this name been one of those common to five hundred families in France; Durand, Boulanger, Leroux, even Mathieu — it would not have mattered so much; but no, it must needs be Valustruc, and when he was introduced to any one, the stranger never failed to ask:

"Are you the son of —?"

"Valustruc, for cash, no credit," he would reply, quoting the most prominent lines of the advertisements that had wrought his undoing, and forcing himself to conceal his discomfiture under a pleasantry.

This habit dated back to his school days. His classmates had tyrannized over him in every conceivable fashion by means of this, "for cash, no credit;" and more than one round of blows had been exchanged on that account. In fact, it had become a sort of *bête noir* that spoiled all his pleasure.

Not that his father denied him anything. Stupid as his son had shown himself at his examinations, the good man entertained the warmest admiration for him. He gave him all the money he could spend, allowed him a separate establishment with horses and carriages, coachmen, valets and grooms; everything, indeed, to place him on an equal footing with the most pretentious and aristocratic of his companions.

The gentleman who was with him in the opera box which Godefroy had just entered, was not likely to sneer at Valustruc either on account of his name or origin. He was about forty years of age; a short, stout Corsican with a stolid and unmistakably vulgar face.

Towards the close of the empire, he had realized his ambition; that is to say, after coming to Paris in patched shoes or no shoes at all, he had succeeded in amassing a large, and what might be truly called a portable fortune, as it consisted entirely of first class securities. For one never knows what may happen.

He had met with difficulties enough in acquiring this fortune; he had been obliged to swallow enough rebuffs, and to endure enough mortifications from those he had served, to be firmly resolved not to expose himself to the danger of seeing it swallowed up in case of any political disturbance. Prudence bade him be ready to take flight at the first alarm, with his property in his pocket.

Many of the creatures of the Empire anticipated similar dangers and took analagous precautions.

To tell the truth, this particular individual had no reason to fear that his safety would be endangered, for he was a very insignificant person, invested with importance merely by reflection, or on account of the exalted personages behind him. Though he had no capital himself, he gave heavy orders at the Bourse that exerted a very potent influence on the market; and to certain unpromising enterprises, he had acted the part of a saviour. When he advised a purchase or a sale in the lobby at the Opera, his friends went about whispering:

"That stock is going up, my dear fellow!"

"How do you know?"

"I have received some reliable information."

"From whom?"

"From Etienne Grella."

Every one knew that Etienne Grella, in turn, received his information from persons who occupied high official positions, and people followed his counsels with confidence.

Still, he never speculated on his own account. And why should he? From the fees he received, and the commissions granted him by agents and brokers, he gradually amassed such a handsome fortune that after the crisis of 1871, he came to the conclusion that he had worked long enough, and that he deserved to enjoy the rest of his life.

Moreover, circumstances had made a different man of him, arousing new aspirations, and a longing for consideration which the resumption of his business would not have satisfied.

At Brussels, during the siege and the Commune, he encountered a lady whom he had previously met in certain imperial circles, the Countess des Orniers.

A woman, superb in her beauty — for she was much more than a pretty woman — superb also in her manner and bearing. Her chestnut hair, with its golden reflections, imparted to her clear skin a brilliancy which riveted attention. Her deep greenish-gray eyes, in which a smile was ever lurking, seemed to say far more than she wished; and between her rather full, dewy lips gleamed small, even teeth of pearly whiteness.

Her charms and the very perfection of her beauty seemed to hold you at a distance. However familiar might be her greeting, the less ceremony she displayed, the more one was compelled to respect her, in spite of the intense desire one felt to win her favor.

The daughter of a political refugee and a *modiste* on

the *Rue de la Paix*, she found herself, at the age of eighteen, a penniless orphan, afflicted with very worldly tastes; and the superior of one of the most fashionable of Parisian convents, where she had been educated at great expense, found a situation for her as governess in a noble family in one of the inland provinces.

The family consisted of the father and mother and two children, a girl of twelve and a young man aged about twenty-four. After a six months sojourn in the Château des Orniers, the beautiful orphan naturally became a power in the household, the master of it being an old *roué*, aged at least fifty-seven, who had married, when only twenty-two, a cousin about his own age, and who, far from having completed the sowing of his wild oats, still prided himself on his marital infidelity and his conquests.

The result was a terrible but quiet drama, at the conclusion of which the governess left the house, but not without her revenge, for her pupil's brother joined her two days afterwards, and married the young lady out of hand, without being dismayed in the least by the prospect of his parents' curse.

His father died of jealousy; whereupon, the young man's mother, freed from the conjugal yoke, undertook to separate him from the beautiful coquette whom the Evil One had placed in his path to try his virtue and imperil his chance of Heaven.

The mother found this no easy task, especially as her

clever and unscrupulous daughter-in-law, who ruled her husband completely, speedily acquired a firm hold on imperial favor. Nevertheless, the widow's perseverance finally triumphed over all obstacles; and one fine day she furnished her son with conclusive proofs of his wife's infidelity.

The next morning at daybreak, a duel took place between him and the man who had wronged him, in which he received a dangerous wound.

His honor seemed to every one so well vindicated that the prosecution of the lady was abandoned, and the matter ended in a legal separation. The wife congratulated herself on this, for she had for a long time found her by no means brilliant husband terribly in the way; and the charming lady continued to shine in the fashionable society of the period.

The defeat of Sedan proved a fatal blow to her prosperity, however; and when Etienne Grella met her in Brussels, the Countess des Orniers was at the end of her resources, and all her jewels were in pawn. He begged the favor of relieving her of her embarrassment, and in this way obtained a hold upon her which she found it impossible to shake off. The condescension of this fashionable lady inflated his vanity until it became absolutely absurd in its pretensions. His relations with her was a sort of brevet of rank to him: and nothing in the world could have induced him to break such a flattering bond; on the contrary, he would have disputed his prey with the entire world.

Woe to the man who might even ostensibly make an attempt to supplant him! Remarkably skilful in the use of all weapons, he would certainly kill his rival like a dog, without troubling himself in the least about public opinion or the consideration due the lady.

Though she occasionally rebelled against his tyranny, she found him of service in so many ways that she did not give him his dismissal; but she was deterred from doing so rather, perhaps, from a fear of arousing the brutal ferocity of his nature than by selfish considerations, though since his return to France he had put her in a way to make a fortune, a very modest fortune, it is true, but one that nevertheless enabled her to maintain a very respectable establishment, while waiting for something better. Besides, he was becoming rather more reasonable, and provided he could be seen in her company the rest mattered little, as his pride only was involved.

On entering the box, the canon's protégé included the entire party in his bow, but Grella and Valustruc having gone out during the intermission, his manner towards the countess suddenly changed.

"I must have a talk with you at the earliest possible moment," he said hurriedly.

"On the subject of your marriage?"

"Exactly."

"Have the Bovilliers returned?"

"I dined with them this evening."

Valastruc re-entering just then, the conversation ceased; but as the countess was leaving her box at the close of the performance she found an opportunity to whisper:

"To-morrow is my day. Come in, and take a cup of tea at eleven o'clock, and we will see what can be done to extricate you from your dilemma."

CHAPTER XIII.

A SYMPATHIZING FRIEND.

THE Countess des Orniers occupied a handsome flat on the Boulevard Malesherbes. The main drawing-room was furnished in a style of severe elegance; beyond it was a little Louis Fifteenth salon, crowded with articles of furniture which not only belonged to that age but were absolutely historical. There was not a chair upon which one of the favorites of that amiable monarch had not at some time or other seated herself, nor a screen, nor a fan that had not its history. On the other side of the hall, a kind of Oriental boudoir hung with authentic tapestries opened into an admirably kept conservatory.

Every Thursday all these apartments were filled with a crowd of influential and agreeable gentlemen, interspersed with perhaps a dozen very plain and unattractive ladies. The majority were the wives of men who had formerly held positions under the government, some were the treasurers or presidents of charitable societies; in short, a number of foils collected by the mistress of the house with great care. Here, the different factions of the opposition met as if by chance, and talked, without any fear of compromising themselves, of the coalitions and the *Coup d'Etat* about which

many rumors were rife, finding in the residence of the countess a neutral ground where they could talk and scheme to their heart's content.

When Godefroy arrived there, late in the evening on the day following the interview at the Opera, the rooms were only half full, for the notables having departed to show themselves elsewhere, only the lesser lights remained. Being a prudent person, the countess had also successfully manœuvred to rid herself of Grella and of young Valastruc, who was the greatest gossip on earth, and whose sharp and spiteful tongue nothing could check. Having succeeded in this, she did not even wait for the other guests to take leave to grant a private audience to Louise's betrothed.

"Go to my room," she whispered, "I will be there in a moment."

In fact, Godefroy had not spent five minutes in a sort of boudoir, closed to the profane, when the countess appeared and flung herself upon a divan, the luxurious cushions of which nearly concealed her from sight.

"Well, what is the matter with you, my big baby?" she exclaimed. "You displayed a very doleful visage last evening in my box. Tell me your troubles."

"Ah well," replied the young man, "I am to be married in two or three months; and unless I confess to the canon that I have spent the four hundred thousand francs I inherited from my mother, I shall be obliged to show the amount to the notary who has

been intrusted with the preparation of the marriage contract."

"I understand; it is an extremely embarrassing position."

"By no means," replied the young man, "if I only had some friend who would be willing to loan me the amount for twenty-four hours."

"For twenty-four hours? What do you mean?"

"It is very simple. Suppose you had four hundred thousand francs in securities or bonds, and you were confiding enough to loan them to me for a day, taking a receipt from me, of course—"

"You are a simpleton," said the countess, interrupting him. "If I had the money you know very well it would be at your disposal, without any security."

"Then you would commit an act of unnecessary imprudence," replied Godefroy.

"Why?"

"I might die; and in that case you would be simply robbed, in spite of me, and of anything you might say. But let us go on," he added, wisely thinking that this was a very senseless discussion, as she did not possess the money. "So if any one would trust me to-morrow, for instance, with the sum I am supposed to possess, I could place it in the hands of the notary, and when the contract had once been signed, and the benediction of the Church obtained, I could restore it to its owner without any trouble, as it would have been the means of securing me about a million and a half. Do you catch my meaning, now?"

"Only too well," she replied, in a peculiar tone.

Though a person may say nothing, a lack of principle on the part of a comrade always shocks one a little, in spite of the secret and ill-defined satisfaction a man always experiences on finding a comrade more unprincipled than himself. If this had been only a question of deceiving a prospective father-in-law or a notary; in short, a man, it would have mattered little. But to dupe an innocent young girl who had seen nothing of the world, and who believed her betrothed an honorable man! Except in case of a personal and well developed resentment generally inspired by jealousy, women seldom lose a certain *esprit de corps*, an instinctive unity of feeling that protects them wonderfully from any intentional injustice on the part of the other sex.

The scheme in which Count d'Aitignies seemed anxious to interest her, was at first bitterly distasteful to this woman who had shown no mercy to those she had made use of in advancing her own interests; but Godefroy explained his plan with such perfect frankness, and such an evident freedom from anything like compunctions of conscience, that she soon became comparatively reconciled to it; besides, she was really very fond of him. Old as he was, she treated him like a child, and had an inexhaustible fund of indulgence at the disposal of her "*big baby*" as she called him, so smiling in spite of herself, she remarked:

"Are you aware that what you propose is not strictly honest?"

He looked at her in evident astonishment.

"But why not?" he demanded in a tone of profound conviction. "What is there so very wrong about it? Is it not done every day in the best society?"

Evidently, this was an unanswerable argument in his opinion. The countess having none equally potent to offer, soon entered into a discussion with him on the ways and means to be employed. Where could he find a friend sufficiently confiding and reticent to loan him the money under such circumstances?

"There *is* a person," she remarked, after reflecting a moment. "But it is a man who is not remarkably fond of you, and who is even absurdly jealous of you."

"Etienne Grella?" inquired the young man. "That would really be too absurd."

The countess also laughed and gave her companion a blow with her fan.

"Still, I know of no one else at all likely to do you such a favor," she rejoined.

Godefroy made a very expressive grimace as he replied:

"In that case, I may as well reconcile myself to my fate."

Then naïvely anxious and perturbed in mind, he added:

"There is no hope for me. My affairs are in a terrible condition. To say nothing of my creditors, who are likely to pounce upon me at any moment, the canon would almost take my head off. I do not know

what is to become of me. There is nothing in the world except this marriage that will enable me to maintain my rank in society; for if I am sold out, as I soon shall be, I shall either be obliged to go to Africa or turn monk."

His evident sorrow conquered her completely.

"Leave it all to me," she whispered. "I will attend to it; and at any hour you wish, you shall be able to produce the four hundred thousand francs which will assure your wife's dowry, and—and, yes, it is Etienne Grella who shall furnish them."

"In spite of his jealousy?"

"On account of his jealousy."

"I do not understand you."

"What does that matter, provided your object is attained?"

"But I wish to understand."

"Ah," she exclaimed with an expression of triumphant cunning, "you are not very deep, my poor boy! I shall be indebted to his jealousy for the means of enabling you to contract this marriage. Instead of making any objection, he will gladly accede to my wishes, certain that this union will create an insurmountable barrier between us."

Godefroy regarded her with intense admiration. How clever this woman was! How adroitly she would extricate her husband from any difficulties! Ah, if she were only free, how glad he would be to marry her! He felt that by entrusting his future entirely to her

and blindly yielding to her guidance, he would attain an exalted position. Why was it that insignificant and sickly Count de Orniers should retain such a tenacious hold on life. The sword thrust he had received in his duel, far from destroying his health, seemed to have produced a favorable crisis in his physical organization; and the news that his divorced wife received of him, was not of a nature to give her any hope of a speedy release. On the contrary, he was leading with his mother, the healthy life of a country gentleman, gaining flesh, developing his muscles, and threatening to outlive the most vigorous of his generation.

While Godefroy was engaged in these reflections, the countess was considering the probable consequences of this marriage which she had promised to effect. Persons who are dishonest themselves, find it difficult to believe in the honesty of others, and she had no idea of being made a dupe.

"What kind of a person is your betrothed?" she asked at last.

"A marriageable girl, nothing more or less."

"Pretty?"

"Not bad looking."

"Intelligent?"

"She is one of those young girls who have been allowed too much freedom, and who are induced to rebel against rightful authority by an unfortunate love of investigation. Though very well-bred, she thinks she must express an opinion on any and all subjects; in fact, she is in a state of continual revolt."

The young man's criticism was certainly of a nature to reassure the countess. Evidently, Godefroy was not very deeply infatuated with this young girl. Still, she was resolved to satisfy herself on this point.

"Are you in love with her?" she inquired, looking her companion full in the face.

"What an idea!"

One point only remained in doubt. The most depraved and unscrupulous men are sometimes strangely sensitive where their wives are concerned.

"Will you present me to her?" she asked.

"Certainly," he replied without the slightest hesitation.

"And will you receive me openly at your house?"

"Why not?"

"You know I have enemies who might prejudice her against me and tell her——"

"Have no fears of anything of that sort," exclaimed Godefroy indignantly. "Rest assured that I intend to be master of my own house."

"Ah," murmured the Countess, "I suppose you will find it difficult to believe that I am making a great sacrifice in allowing you to marry."

He interrupted her by falling on his knees before her.

"I have never loved, and I shall never love any one but you," he whispered, kissing her hands with an emotion which was not altogether feigned.

The lady while abandoning her hands to his kisses,

was deeply absorbed in a mental survey of the situation: but coming to a sudden and final decision, she took his head in her two hands and looking him full in the face, said:

"You are my big baby, and I was foolish and unjust to distrust you, so I swear that Etienne Grella shall furnish you with the means of obtaining possession of the little Bovilliers' million and a half."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ARTIST'S HOME.

FAR up in the *Quartier des Martyrs*, at the end of the Rue de Bréda, is a square known as the *Cite Frochot.* It was formerly a small park, which has since been divided into building lots, upon which villas of divers kinds have been constructed, that are in summer almost concealed by the luxuriant foliage in which they are embowered.

Here, a number of artists and writers have taken up their abode, forming a quiet colony whose tranquillity is not disturbed by the noise of Parisian streets.

Pierre Wavre occupied the most unpretentious of these dwellings. To reach it, one was obliged to pass through a garden upon which no care had ever been bestowed. In the early spring-time it was filled with the perfume of lilac blossoms, but afterwards only a mass of verdure was visible.

A single path overgrown with moss, led from the low wooden gateway to the short flight of steps before the door; then one entered a square antechamber furnished with tall and heavily carved Flemish chairs of varnished oak. On one side, was a narrow stairway which one must ascend to reach the young man's chamber. That apartment contained nothing worthy of

mention; a bed, a chest of drawers with brass trimmings, four odd chairs standing on a well worn carpet, a small clock, between a pair of candelabra,—nothing of value,—a place to sleep in, that was all.

Back of this was a dressing room quite comfortably arranged by his predecessors.

The small dining-room was furnished more elegantly. It contained several pieces of choice *faience*, and some curiously wrought vessels in copper and bronze. In each corner, on a pedestal, stood a bronze statue of a torch-bearer, which imparted to the room an essentially feudal aspect.

At the farther end of the antechamber, folding doors opened into the studio.

There was nothing extraordinary about this apartment, lighted from the north, except its gigantic dimensions. The furniture consisted of incongruous chairs, a Louis Sixteenth cabinet, a table of the style of the First Empire, and a square piano. But easels of every shape, plaster casts of antique statues, and sketches completely covered the gray walls. On the floor, stood a large number of pictures in all stages of completion, and a platform covered with a Turkish carpet of subdued tints, for models. In short, it was a studio with no other character than that of assiduous labor.

One morning, Pierre who had risen at daybreak, was there busily engaged in completing a landscape from sketches brought from Italy, when suddenly the bell attached to the wooden gate rang loudly.

"It is the postman," Pierre thought. "I wonder who can have written to me."

But no; after the sound of a hurried opening and shutting of doors, the voices of children resounded in the antechamber, and almost instantly two chubby faced boys burst into the room, seizing him around the legs, and crying:

"Good morning, uncle!"

Behind them appeared a young and blooming woman whose face was radiant with health and happiness, and whose arms and hands were laden with packages of every form and size.

"If we disturb you, so much the better," she exclaimed gayly. "A whole fortnight has passed since you have paid us a visit, so we invited ourselves to breakfast with you this morning. Relieve me of all my bundles so I can embrace you."

Consigning to his charge the viands and fruits with which she was laden, she seated herself without ceremony, pulled the artist down on his knees before her, and taking his face between her small, daintily-gloved hands, deposited several hearty, motherly kisses upon his cheeks.

"Shame on you, monster!" she cried, "for making us pine for you so long. Now, pay me back some of the kisses you owe me."

As the reader has probably guessed, this young lady was Pierre's sister, Magdalene, the wife of Colonel Morseux, who had recently been appointed examiner at the Polytechnic.

She had been so delighted at this appointment. Thanks to it, she would be able to see her brother almost constantly; a great pleasure to her who had been so long separated from him on account of his long sojourn in Rome, and afterwards, by the necessity of following her husband to country garrisons.

And now this naughty brother instead of availing himself of the privilege thus afforded, held himself aloof. Why? She had asked herself this question in vain; so, sure of an affectionate reception, she had determined to pay him a visit, not to demand an explanation—for though married, she felt for her elder brother a sort of filial respect, peculiar to the Israelites—but to remind him of her desire to see him often, if it were only that he might be a witness of the domestic happiness with which she was blessed.

Pierre allowed himself to be scolded and caressed, remaining on his knees before her, and gazing at her with a pleased look in which one could read both gratitude and admiration. He admired her, for from this young woman, to whom duty seemed so simple and easy a matter, emanated a truly healthful and beneficent influence; and on seeing her there, accompanied by her two children who were the very picture of contentment, the romantic visions which had been invoked by his recollections of Louise, took to themselves wings.

What pangs of disappointed love, or sullen rage or imaginary despair could linger in the presence of Magdalene, one's very ideal of a wife and a mother? In

her, true happiness and the truest love were personified; and by contrast, the passion which had been tormenting him seemed paltry and morbid; something very like infatuation.

"You are most welcome," he replied, returning her kisses. "Make yourself at home; give any orders you like, and lend to my abode a festive air. The sight of you rejoices my heart and imparts new life, and I adore you."

A hearty voice, a trifle boisterous in its gayety, responded to this outburst of affection by a loud "Bravo!"

It was Colonel Morseux who had just entered. He, too, had his hands and pockets filled with dainties, which he deposited one by one on the corner of the table, with an air of wonderful complacency, unmindful of the merriment of his wife and children who were laughing immoderately.

He had purchased the very same articles Magdalene had brought, and like her, was ostentatiously enumerating them. The breakfast was consequently doubled; and when the colonel discovered the fact, he laughed even more heartily than the others.

Under such conditions, it was impossible for the repast to be a melancholy one. To relieve the artist's only servant, every one rose to set the table except Pierre, who was not allowed to do so. This was because he was the head of the family, and because in spite of the mirth that prevailed, tradition required him to preside at the repast.

The Jews have certain family customs which nothing can change, though they are customs that do not prevent affectionate freedom and familiar affability. This reverence for the head of the household seems to run in the blood, a reverence tinged with religious feeling, and supremely tender in its nature. Thus, on taking their places at the table, Pierre seated himself first, while the others remained standing until the younger of the two children, whose place was on the left of the patriarch, had recited aloud a short prayer, entreating the blessing of the God of Israel.

This invocation consisted of barely twenty words, twenty words, quickly spoken with all the confiding simplicity of an artless soul which honors a God whom it does not fear, because it feels and knows and believes that this God can exist only under the condition of being ineffably and inconceivably merciful and good.

"You can scarcely imagine how delighted I am to find you in such good spirits this morning," said Magdalene, placing her hand on that of her brother. "The last two or three times you were at our house you troubled us greatly by a depression of spirits which you tried in vain to conceal from us. Not daring to question you, but wounded by your reserve, and your apparent want of confidence in us, we indulged in a thousand absurd but depressing suppositions. Thank God, that is all over now. You are yourself again and I am rejoiced."

"It is true," added the Colonel, "and though I felt

that I had no right to intrude upon your confidence, I had fully made up my mind to ask you to relieve our anxiety."

Pierre gave his brother-in-law his hand, and addressing his sister, said:

"There was no real cause for anxiety. An artist's life is not unfrequently disturbed by such crises, in which one distrusts one's self and the future. Solitary work is the cause of them; weariness of the brain produces nervous prostration, and one becomes morose without really knowing why. I have quite recovered from my recent attack now; your kindly scheme of invading my retreat has chased away the last grim phantoms."

They left the table to return to the studio, in which room coffee was served. The children amused themselves in a corner with one of their uncle's sketch-books; and Magdalene, half reclining in an arm-chair, watched them out of the corner of her eye, while the gentlemen smoked.

"How are you progressing with your exhibit for the Exhibition?" Morseux inquired suddenly.

"And of what will it consist?" asked his wife.

"Of two pictures," replied Pierre. "The landscape upon which I was working when you came in, and a large picture, a sketch of which you saw last summer, I believe."

"Is it completed?"

"Not yet. I have sedulously avoided working on it

for more than two months. It had become a mere blur of colors that dazzled my eyes, and I was obliged to put it aside for awhile."

"Shall you begin work on it again soon?"

"To-morrow, for, as you see, my landscape is completed."

Magdalene and her husband exchanged a glance as if to mutually encourage each other to commit an indiscretion to which they were certainly impelled more forcibly by fraternal interest than curiosity.

The venture was finally made by the lady.

"There is no great difference between to-day and to-morrow, is there? They seem to me much the same thing. You would confer a great pleasure by showing us your picture while we are here."

"Very well," replied the artist. "I will do so provided you will express your honest opinion in regard to my work. I ask this as a favor, and shall be really obliged to you if you will do so."

As he spoke, he pushed back the platform, and arranged the curtains in such a way as to admit a very strong light into the studio: these preparations having been completed, and his critics seated at a proper distance, he slowly turned an easel upon which rested a large canvas, which had previously stood face to the wall.

It was a historical subject: an episode of the reign of the Spanish Inquisition.

On one side of the court-yard of a palace stood a

number of Jewish families who, to escape persecution or compulsory conversion, had attempted to leave the country in spite of the law forbidding it. They were guarded by the soldiers who had overtaken and captured them in their flight.

Aged men, women and children, covered with dust, and wan with fatigue, huddled close together with an expression of resignation rather than fear, upon their faces. In the foreground, one of the number, a young man with bound hands and garments torn in a supposed struggle, was casting a look of proud tranquillity and scorn, a look of defiance, on some priests and prelates belonging to the court of the prince before whom the captives were to be led. In the back-ground, a crowd.

For the principal figure, a young girl, surrounded by maids of honor, who was surveying these unfortunates with haughty curiosity. In spite of her beauty and charms of person, there was in her expression a fanatical sternness that contrasted strangely with her youthful loveliness. There was cruelty in her eyes, the arrogant triumph of a soul darkened by a savage faith.

It was upon this cruel maiden that the eyes of the artist riveted themselves; and in his face one could read a mingled contempt and pity for this young and beautiful girl who gazed so insultingly at the vanquished.

For a long time the Morseux family stood silently contemplating the picture.

"It is very beautiful," exclaimed Magdalene at last, with pardonable pride.

"Very beautiful," repeated Morseux. "I do not see what you can do to improve it."

"A few slight changes; some half-tints to darken, and some luminous points to bring into more vivid relief."

There was another silence. Then the eldest child, leaning towards its mother, and pointing to the principal figure, exclaimed:

"Mamma, look at that pretty lady. She looks like the sister of that officer with whom we dined the other day at the general's."

"That is a fact," said the Colonel. "It seemed to me I had seen that face somewhere. Do you not notice the resemblance, Magdalene?"

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Still, it can easily be explained," resumed Monseux. "Pierre began her portrait, and the features of his model have remained indelibly impressed upon his memory. You must know whom I mean: Lieutenant Vaconsin's sister."

"Mlle. Louise?" exclaimed Magdalene, suddenly turning towards her brother.

She saw that he was very pale and evidently troubled by an emotion which he was striving hard to overcome, and this afforded her a partial explanation of the sadness which he had not entirely succeeded in concealing from her.

She recollected the singular letter Pierre had written to her during his sojourn at the Château de Bovilliers, a letter in which he had expressed his astonishment at his inclination to speak at such length, and so exclusively of the daughter of his host. Oh, poor, dear Pierre! Could it be that he who was always so mindful of the happiness of others, was so unfortunate as to love without hope, and to be placed in one of those situations where the most untiring devotion can avail nothing?

Perhaps the young man read his sister's thoughts, for assuming a smiling face and a careless tone, he replied quietly:

"It is quite possible. Like certain composers who fancy they have invented a melody which they have only unconsciously remembered, it is not improbable that I, without being aware of it, have given to my figure the face and expression of the young lady you allude to."

Then after another quite prolonged scrutiny, he added:

"Well, yes; there certainly are some points of resemblance. Still, no one will perceive them, and I fear I should spoil the entire composition if I attempted to make any changes."

Magdalene was only partially deceived, and perceiving this, and mastering himself completely, he remarked:

"Then you have met her?"

"Last week, at a little dinner given by the superin-

tendent of the school who is connected by marriage with the Baroness de Bovilliers. If there is any truth in the proverb, your ears must certainly have burned that day."

"Why, did you talk of me?"

"For a long time."

"With her?"

"No, with her brother, Lieutenant Charles Vaconsin. A charming young man who would certainly have a brilliant future if he did not express his democratic opinions quite so openly. If he talks as freely to every one as he did to me, it will be a wonder if his father does not try to induce some of his friends to make way with him."

"I scarcely remember him," replied Pierre; and believing his sister entirely reassured, he changed the subject.

When the clock struck five, the young artist's guests declared that they must leave him, so he escorted them to the gate, placed them in a carriage, and promised to pay them a speedy visit, then, with an altered face, he returned to his studio, and abandoned himself to his memories.

Twilight found him still sitting in silence before his canvas; and in proportion as the shadows rendered his composition more confused, his thoughts seemed to undergo a corresponding change; and once, two big tears which had been slowly gathering in his eyes, rolled down his cheeks, without his taking the trouble

to dry them. Then, suddenly springing up with face on fire, and clenched hands, he uttered an exclamation of intense anger. The martyrdom of his race passed before his mental vision; and a deep hatred for the oppressors of his people filled his heart. He longed for vengeance. He, in turn, longed to defy, insult and vanquish them.

While engaged in painting Louise as the principal figure in his picture, he had constantly reproached himself for making her so beautiful. No; this girl who contemplated with dry eyes, these prisoners, culpable only in having attempted to flee from the tortures to which they were to be subjected in the name of a Merciful God; this girl who, instead of interceding for these unfortunates, surveyed them with a haughty glance in which disgust was dominant, could not be beautiful. What weakness had prevented him from depicting upon this countenance the hideous moral deformity that disfigured the nature of its possessor? He determined now, to make such changes in the picture that the resemblance which had struck Magdalene's child, should be so unmistakable as to compel Louise to recognize herself.

At that moment, he hated himself for the tears he had just shed, and for the grief he had experienced since their separation; and he summoned all his pride to aid him in stifling a love which seemed to him now a pitiful weakness.

But in spite of his efforts, pride did not win a victory

after all, greatly as he longed to triumph over this girl, to humiliate her and arouse her regret.

All this was a foolish dream against which his reason protested; a feverish crisis which, in spite of all his efforts to close his eyes to the truth, convinced him that this hopeless passion had taken complete possession of his heart.

Just then, the woman who took care of his apartments entered with a lamp, bringing his letters and the evening paper.

He glanced abstractedly over the letters, and unfolding the paper purely from force of habit, ran his eyes rapidly over the columns. Suddenly, a great tension seemed to fall upon his nerves, and through a mist that seemed to have abruptly obscured his vision, he deciphered this paragraph in the list of contemplated marriages:

"*Count Godefroy d'Aitignies (rentier) to Mlle. Louise Vaconsin (de Bovilliers) without profession.*"

"Ah well, so much the better!" he cried passionately. "Thank God! I am delivered now, cured of an absurd love which my imagination alone endowed with importance. I was mad. Let us think no more about it!"

And going up to his chamber, he dressed himself, intending to go in search of some of his acquaintances in order to dine and spend the evening at a place of public amusement.

On putting on his hat he began to laugh bitterly.

"To think that I could have been such a fool!" he exclaimed.

Then with a little disdain, he added:

"So she has contented herself with that simpleton. It is true, that he is baptized. They can attend church together; they will fast on Friday and go to confession in company: consequently theirs will be a happy household. Unity of faith is an important requisite. She will possess that. Much good may it do her!"

CHAPTER XV.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

A MAGNIFICENT fête was in progress in the salons of the Minister of Public Instruction and of the Fine Arts. As we have said, a strong tide of reaction had set in, and the famous general who up to that time had gone by the name of the "illustrious conqueror," but who like any other marshal was soon to be anathematized under the title of an "illustrious executioner," had just appointed a number of officials whose chief duty seemed to consist in entertaining society, so the salons of the *Elyseé* were continually ablaze with lights, and a round of entertainments was held there at which the Conservatives deemed it necessary to show themselves in order to add as much as possible to the glory of their triumph. They must, indeed, feel very secure, and be fully in accord on all points, to amuse themselves so publicly in open defiance of public opinion.

The fête was truly superb. There was a concert in the principal salon; selections from different operas, with comic scenes by Potel, Berthelier and Madame Théo, which prelates heartily applauded, determined to sustain the government on every point, and on all occasions.

Among the guests there were not a few who attended from a sense of duty, and among the number was Baron Vaconsin de Bovilliers, who had been obliged to argue a long time with his wife in order to induce her to accompany him. He had even been obliged to call in the assistance of Abbé Rémondat, who had carried the day by repeatedly assuring the Baroness—*née* de Bèlencour, that the hydra anarchy had received a terrible blow.

Louise, who had also made some objections at first, seeing how her mother shrank from the ordeal, had offered to accompany her, and this delighted the baron.

What risk would the ladies run after all? A corner should be found in which they could install themselves, their attendants would form a circle around them which would serve as a rampart, and they need remain only just long enough to have their presence noticed by the Ministry.

The first person they saw was Godefroy d'Aitignies; and on perceiving them, he at once left a group of acquaintances to come and speak to them. In the centre of the party which he had deserted, was a lady who instantly attracted the attention of Louise, first, by reason of her beauty, and afterwards, by the scrutinizing, almost impertinent look she bestowed upon the young girl.

"Who is that lady?" Louise asked.

"The Countess des Orniers," replied Godefroy.

"I do not know her."

"So much the better, Mademoiselle," added the hearty voice of Colonel Morseux who had approached, on recognizing the ladies.

Godefroy looked at him with some anxiety. What was the colonel going to say about his particular friend?

Nothing good evidently; and in fact, the baroness had no sooner ensconced herself in a comfortable corner and exchanged a few polite remarks with Magdalene and her husband, than she requested the colonel to tell her what he knew about the lady in question.

"And you are intimately acquainted with this lady?" Louise said to Godefroy in evident surprise after the colonel had concluded his remarks. The necessity of denying the countess while she was exerting herself to do him such a signal service was very disagreeable to the young man.

"Many of her friends are my friends," he replied, with pretended indifference, "and I pay a visit to her salon occasionally as one visits any house which one is likely to desert at any moment from weariness, caprice or indifference. Besides, Colonel Morseux is perhaps too severe. Though I am not ignorant of the reports circulated about this lady with more or less charitableness, I must, if I speak the truth, declare that I have never noticed anything in the least out of the way at her house."

"Then your friend Etienne Grella has better eyes, my dear sir," was the colonel's laughing reply.

"Is he the originator of these stories?"

"He circulates them, at least, when jealousy raises his blood to fever heat."

This silenced Godefroy. He had certainly excited Grella's jealousy, and he trembled lest the colonel should indulge in some allusion which would not escape Louise.

But these apprehensions were soon relieved, for Morseux lowering his voice, reminded Godefroy that only a short time before the Corsican had uttered terrible threats against young Valastruc.

Reassured upon this point, Godefroy soon perceived another danger. The countess was recalling him to her side by imperious glances. It would not do to offend her; but to desert the Bovilliers, for one who had just been spoken of in such disparaging terms would have amounted to an actual protest.

Doubtless the canon would extricate him from this difficulty, for he had just appeared near the door, and was now engaged in conversation with a young man whom he seemed delighted to meet.

"Look at M. Rémondat," exclaimed Magdalene laughing. "He will certainly draw down upon himself the censure of the Vatican by such a display of kindness and courtesy to a heretic."

"Where is he?" inquired the baroness.

"There, near the door. Do you not see that he has just slipped his arm through that of my brother?"

"M. Wavre? oh, yes," replied the baron. "I shall

be charmed to meet him again. But what is the canon doing? Instead of bringing him to us he is taking him to the Conference."

By the Conference, the baron meant the little group which had assembled around the Countess des Orniers, and to which the canon was leading the artist in order to present him to the Recamier of the clerical coalition.

"He is probably not aware of your presence," said Godefroy, eagerly seizing upon the means of escape thus afforded. "I will go and inform him."

Louise did not notice his departure. The name uttered by her father had startled her so much that she had all she could do to maintain her composure.

As he was present, and in the company of the canon, and as Godefroy was about to tell them both that the Bovilliers and Colonel Morseux and wife were there, there could be no doubt that Pierre would speedily make his appearance.

Would she be able to show him a calm and unmoved countenance? What a strange meeting after their last interview that evening when, under the influence of some strange hallucination, they had so ingenuously revealed their mutual love! It seemed to the young girl now, that she had betrayed him, and that she owed him an explanation of her weakness and of her breach of faith.

And what stand would he take? What must he think? Did he know that she was betrothed to Godefroy?

The meetings one dreads most are often attended with wonderful simplicity. This was the case in the present instance, both Louise and Pierre having had abundant time to prepare themselves for it.

Captured by Rémondat, the artist, after being informed of Mlle. Louise's presence, allowed himself to be introduced to the beautiful Madame des Orniers without attaching the slightest importance to the presentation, and while exchanging a few commonplace remarks with her, had time to steel himself against the emotion that was to follow. Certain acquaintances whom he met near the countess aided him not a little in his efforts, so on approaching Louise, he had his feelings completely under control, and when the canon proposed that they should pay their respects to Madame de Bovilliers, the young man acquiesced with a willingness which completely deceived even the crafty abbé.

The reader may recollect that while watching these two young people one morning on the steps at the Château de Bovilliers, the canon had detected the interchange of an only too eloquent look when he asked their opinion of Godefroy, and that this look had caused the worthy priest dire misgivings; and now, in spite of the time that had elapsed, and the ease with which Louise had been induced to accept the Count d'Aitignies, the abbé had not forgotten that sarcastic glance, and he blessed the kindly fate which had enabled him to play the part of an attentive witness at a meeting between the artist and his model after such a long separation.

But he perceived nothing that need arouse any apprehensions. Both, being prepared, were more than equal to the situation; and they exchanged greetings with a calmness and apparent serenity which surprised themselves, as well as the canon and Magdalene, who did not once take her eyes from them.

In the mean time, the countess was subjecting Godefroy to a rigid cross-examination.

"Why did you tell me your betrothed was not bad looking?" she asked. "She is remarkably beautiful. You know, my dear boy, that I am very willing to devote myself to the task of establishing you comfortably in life, but I do not intend you to amuse yourself at my expense now or afterwards."

"That is sheer nonsense," replied Godefroy. "I have told you the plain truth in regard to my feelings. This marriage is purely a matter of business with me, and however beautiful she may be in the eyes of the rest of humanity, to me she is simply passable looking, and that is all. It is her dowry I marry, as you know very well. One must listen to reason. You know me; you know the situation in which I am placed; you know that I *must* marry, or accept irretrievable ruin. Now, frankly, put the dowry in one side of the scales, and the charms of this St. Agnes in the other, and decide which determines me."

Madame des Orniers was silent for a moment, then she inquired:

"When will this marriage take place?"

"Next month; on the twentieth of July."

"Where?"

"At Bovilliers."

"I will not consent to that."

"Why?"

"I wish to be present; and in that case, it would be impossible."

"Where do you wish it to be, then?"

"Here,—in Paris."

"But how can I induce them to consent?"

"I will take care of that."

"But——"

"Do not give yourself the slightest uneasiness. Your father will arrange all that."

Godefroy turned pale.

"My father?" he stammered.

The countess laughed scornfully.

"Do not give yourself the trouble to say any more. I understand matters. Only listen attentively, Monsieur d'Aitignies,—it is I, do you understand, who will tie the white cravat you put on for the ceremony on the eventful day."

"At that very moment Louise was saying to Pierre in the same tone she would have used in speaking of the weather:

"Shall you send a fine exhibit to the Salon this year, Monsieur Wavre?"

CHAPTER XVI.

UNHEEDED WARNINGS.

"MY dearest," began the Baroness de Bovilliers on entering her daughter's chamber one morning; "you really must aid us or we shall never get through in time."

"Aid you in what, mamma?"

"In directing the cards of invitation for your marriage. That miserable canon has beguiled us into consenting that the ceremony shall be performed in Paris, though what can have put such a whim into his head I fail to understand, for you must remember very well that he agreed with us in thinking it best for the marriage to take place in the country. But now, he has suddenly changed his mind; his wonderful successes must have turned his head, I think; and here we are in Paris, and here we are to remain until after your nuptials, that is, until the middle of July. Was ever anything so absurd? But it is decided, so let us say no more about it. Still, there are only a few days left now, and as these invitations must be sent out at once, your father and I are at our wits' end. If you do not lend a hand, more than a third of them will not reach their destination until the morning after the ceremony. I certainly am fond of you, Louise, but I consider

myself very fortunate in having no other daughter to marry off. If I had, I should certainly go mad."

"Give them to me, mamma," responded Louise laughing. "I will write until I lose the use of my fingers."

As she spoke she sprang out of bed, slipped on a dressing-gown and seating herself resolutely at her writing-desk, she dipped her pen into the ink with a business-like air.

The baroness watched her a moment, then gave vent to her feelings by exclaiming:

"Do you know that you astonish me?"

"And why?"

"You seem completely unmoved by the near approach of this great change in your life. Usually, marriage awakens no little anxiety in the heart of a young girl."

"That depends entirely upon one's education and the circumstances," replied Louise. "Why should you expect me to feel anxious? It is you and my father who are marrying me; I have nothing to say in the matter. I have confidence in you; of course you have taken every care and precaution; and as you say to me: "This is the husband I have chosen for you," I trust to your judgment, and I am going straight on with closed eyes."

"But does this husband please you?"

"Enough for me to consent to unite my life with his."

"But—I do not know exactly how to express it—

interference is always such a very delicate matter in these cases."

"Not between you and me, mamma. Tell me plainly what is on your mind."

"Ah well, do you love him?"

Louise smiled.

"As people love in a romance? No; that is very certain; and even if anything should occur to break off the match, I confess that I should not feel the least desire to drown myself, or to take the veil."

"I hope not, indeed, my dear."

"No; there is not the slightest danger of that: but nevertheless, I do not hesitate to say that I expect to become reasonably fond of my husband, if he does not do anything to prevent it. I refrain from judging him, and am simply waiting until married life teaches me to know and appreciate him. I do not think his is a very romantic temperament, which may be regarded as an advantage or a disadvantage according to the stand-point from which one views the matter. It is so much the worse for him, perhaps; and certainly, so much the better for me; for, as he will not be exacting, there will be no necessity on my part, of resorting to deceptions which are always painful. Understand me, mamma," she added, "the necessity of establishing myself in life being apparent and unquestionable, I submit to it with good grace; that is the main thing: and as this can be effected only by marriage, I unhesitatingly comply with your wishes. As to the husband

you have chosen for me, provided I have reason to respect him and to desire to please him, he will win from me a very true and faithful affection. What more can I say? On the whole, I am anxious to be to him not only a good wife, but a wife who will do him honor; and if he desires it, a helpmeet in the truest sense of the word."

"But if, instead of Godefroy, we had chosen the next comer—"

"It would have been exactly the same. Why, mamma, you do not suppose because I have received a beautiful bouquet that cost at least a louis, from my betrothed every morning for three weeks, that I pass my nights in dreaming of the moon."

"No, but your calmness frightens me a little!"

"What an idea!"

"I fear it is resignation rather than contentment."

"Resignation is too strong a word. Besides, you and my father have exercised no compulsion; consequently there can be no such thing as resignation in this connection."

Though the baroness continued to question her daughter for some time, she could extort no more explicit avowal from her. Then she compared her early experience with that of her daughter. Once more she saw herself with eyes swollen with weeping, wildly contending against her father in her resolve not to accept the husband he was forcing upon her, and she said to herself that Louise was extremely for-

tunate in comparison, and left her finally, almost persuaded that she had done everything maternal solicitude demanded under the circumstances.

"In any case," she said to herself on regaining her own room, "she is certainly perfectly *comme il faut*."

And driving away divers doubts and scruples that her son had awakened in her mind, she exclaimed:

"Charles is blind! What can have led him to suppose that his sister is sacrificing herself? The dear boy has a morbid imagination. I discovered it a long time ago, when he first began to prate about his liberalistic ideas, ideas which are most unbecoming in a child of mine. If he troubles me any more, I shall send him to Louise. Now, I will finish the detestable task of addressing this pile of invitations. I will wager anything that M. de Bovilliers is taking his time with his. That man has sworn to displease me in everything, even the pettiest detail."

After her mother's departure, Louise set about her work in earnest; but suddenly, on turning a page of her list, she saw a name that made her start:

M. Pierre Wavre.

With eyes fixed upon this name, she fell into an unconscious reverie. All that had passed between them, recurred to her mind; and again, in spite of her resistance, she was obliged to admit that she loved with a deep and absorbing passion this man whose religion

she had been taught to scorn. Unconsciously, she compared Pierre with the man to whom she was about to bind herself for life. What a contrast! The very impossibility of denying the artist's superiority incensed her against him. Why — if he loved her, and if he understood he was loved in return — had he not sacrificed his mistaken and culpable belief to his love? What besides an overweening vanity could have prevented him from abjuring his heresy? Did he love her or not? If he did love her, why had he not made the sacrifice?

But when her natural honesty compelled her to ask herself the same question, she found herself in a dilemma from which she could extricate herself only by the great argument of women, by saying to herself in all sincerity: "That is an entirely different thing." For would she not be compelled to deny the true God by forsaking her religion, while Pierre's faith was only a wicked and unpardonable error.

But *did* he love her?

She was unable to answer this question. How could she be certain that the short romance at the château de Bovilliers had not been the result of fleeting impressions born of picturesque surroundings and constant companionship? Since their separation, was it not more than probable that Pierre had forgotten her?

What reason had she to think otherwise? Was it not quite as likely that his absolute silence was the result of forgetfulness as of prudence?

Then she thought of the morning when he had at last given her his hand after he had so sternly refused to do so, and the recollection of the blissful happiness she had then experienced, quickened the beating of her heart and made her bosom heave with emotion.

Just then some one rapped at her door. Never was an interruption more unwelcome. It seemed to her that she had suddenly fallen from heaven, and for an instant, without any idea of the time or place, she stared vacantly at her brother who had just entered.

"I have come to breakfast with you, Louise," said the lieutenant, "and afterwards, I will take you to the Salon which will close to-morrow."

"The Salon? What Salon?" she inquired, still unable to collect her thoughts.

"To the exhibition of paintings."

"That is true, I have not been there," she said absently.

"Nor I, and I thought you would like to do so."

"Certainly, especially with you. Mamma has deferred going from day to day. Will she accompany us?"

"No; she and my father are prevented from doing so by an appointment with the notary."

About two o'clock the brother and sister alighted from their carriage before the Palais de l'Industrie, and made their way slowly through the crowd to the galleries on the right. There were only a few pictures

of special merit on exhibition there, and their progress was comparatively unobstructed; but on attempting to enter the large hall at the end of the corridor, they found it difficult to effect an entrance by reason of the crowd assembled before a large painting that occupied the principal panel. Some time elapsed before they could advance near enough to obtain a good view of the picture; but at last they succeeded, and the young girl lifted her large and beautiful eyes to the composition which was attracting almost universal attention.

It was a revelation. Without requiring to be told by her brother, who had glanced at his catalogue, she instantly felt that this was Pierre's picture; and at the very first glance she recognized herself in the tall figure of the haughty and fanatical young girl who stood there gazing with proud disdain upon the prisoners. She also divined the secret thought and motive of the artist, and she remained spell-bound.

These, then, were the sentiments he had imputed to her; this was the opinion he had formed of her character.

Blind man that he was!

She was both grieved and angry; and how gladly she would have detained him here in the midst of the crowd, and whispered:

"You have misunderstood and misjudged me. I am not that proud girl, so bound up in herself and her faith as to be able to contemplate without emotion captives whose only crime is the worship of another

divinity than hers. I do not deserve the look of scornful pity you have caused to be cast upon me, like an insult, by this child of your race, in whom you must have personified yourself. To portray me as I really am, you would be obliged to give me tearful eyes, to make me clasp my hands entreatingly and beseech those cruel men for mercy, to depict upon my features an expression of compassionate terror that would have convinced your prisoners that I would stand between them and the tortures that were being prepared for them."

But of what avail was this mental protest? Who heard it, and who could change the opinion Pierre had formed of her? Would he ever consent to listen to her defence? Every thing here in the picture revealed a desire for revenge.

Revenge! The word reminded her of the questions she had asked herself that very morning. "Does he love me? Did he ever love me, or was that which had passed between us at the château merely the result of a fleeting fancy, born of picturesque surroundings and constant companionship?"

Ah, no! The aggressive character of the composition proved, on the contrary, that Pierre had not forgotten, and that, unable to find relief in indifference, he was trying his best to hate her.

She experienced an undefined but bitter joy which she was not at all inclined to analyze; and she longed to close her eyes and abandon herself unreservedly to

the memory of those days passed together — the one romance of her life.

"It is really a superb work!" exclaimed her brother.

"Is it not?" she responded quickly.

"I have heard it remarked that the principal figure is very like you. Do you notice a resemblance?"

"One can not see one's self very well; still, I do not think I possess either such perfection of beauty or such sternness of expression."

"I am not so sure on the last point."

"What do you mean?"

"You say one can not see one's self. There is occasionally in your eyes, beneath your contracted brows, a flashing light which must have made my future brother-in-law reflect more than once, if he has ever noticed it."

"Do you think he spends much time in that way?" inquired Louise, smiling.

"In reflection? My dear sister," continued Charles, "everything is decided and arranged, and it is advisable for me to keep my opinion to myself; still, this manner of speaking of a man who will be your husband in a week, surprises me a little, I confess, and I once more wonder why you have accepted him."

"I repeat that it would be all the same if it were any one else, since girls of my rank in life must conform to the customs of the sphere to which they belong."

"Only up to a certain point, however."

"What point? Explain, if you please. For example, let us suppose I had replied to my parents: 'No, I do not like M. d'Aitignies; he is too tall and too near-sighted; his disposition does not please me, and I beg that you will allow me to marry some one else'—the painter of this picture, for example."

"Well?"

"Well, you, my dear brother, would have been the very first to say: 'Louise, you lack pride; you forget who we are. M. Wavre possesses talent, undoubtedly; he probably has a brilliant future before him, and a name that will become illustrious; but he is not only an artist, but a Jew, and your love for him is unbecoming in the extreme.' This is what you would have replied, my good brother."

"You are mistaken, Louise," replied the young man, firmly. "Our father might perhaps have used such language, and mamma, yes, mamma would have talked herself hoarse, but I should have said nothing of the kind."

"No?"

"No, my dear, I should not have uttered a word of these pretended objections; but on the contrary, taking you into a quiet corner and holding your pretty little hand closely in mine, I should have said: 'If you love him, Louisette, you must marry him, and I am going to take such steps as will enable you to do so as speedily and easily as possible.'"

"What! you would have consented for me to become the wife of a Jew?"

"Why not, if he had won your heart? What does the form under which one worships God matter, so that one worships him? And certainly, it would, in my opinion, be far more honest and sensible and more commendable for you to marry a Jew who had inspired you with love and respect, than to marry a Catholic so constituted that you can feel for him even now, only a spirit of toleration. You think you are performing a praiseworthy act in uncomplaingly accepting the uninviting fate that awaits you. You are wrong, Louise. Duty, for an intelligent woman consists in the fulfillment of her entire mission. To marry, without love, is, believe me, no way to set a good example to a family. Though I do not wish to evince a lack of respect, you will understand what I mean when I tell you to look at our own parents. Their marriage was very similar to the one you are about to contract, and see the result. They have a house, but where is the home? There is no unity of feeling: and the father's authority is contested, or submitted to only under protest, by a woman who considers herself infinitely his superior and who yields him no respect, a woman, but no wife. And what has been the result so far as you and I are concerned? I have left a house where I could not approve the course of one parent, without exciting the anger of the other. Compelled to love them separately, without being able to unite them in my heart, drawn first this way and then the other by their opposing influence, I wished to avoid being made

a judge in their frequent controversies, I separated myself from both of them, and formed for myself an existence, convictions and ideal utterly unlike theirs. The same causes have produced an analagous, though apparently different effect upon you. You remain a member of the household, but you annihilate your own individuality, and turning a deaf ear to the siren voice of youth, and sacrificing the natural aspirations of twenty years, through indifference or a mistaken sense of duty, you are about to make a very foolish marriage. At least, it is a suitable one, you say. Are you sure of that? How do you know that others as well as myself are not surprised that you should consent to accept as a husband a man who has neither merit, good looks, talent nor fortune? Do you think people would have been much more surprised to learn that Mlle. Vaconsin was about to wed a talented Jew who had already won an enviable reputation, and who was handsome, brilliant, talented and comparatively sure of a great future and a large fortune? You are behind the times, my dear; you have not taken the trouble to notice the changes that are taking place in regard to the Israelites in modern society. Scan the list of awards made by the University of France. Among the laureates you will always find Jewish names. Even outside of financial circles, where the sons of Israel reign undisputed masters by their traditional business talent (it is from them too, that we have learned the laws that govern banking, exchange and circulation) you will find them

everywhere in the foremost rank. At the bar, in the army, in manufactures, in the sciences and especially, in the arts, they have been at least on a par with their Catholic rivals, since the Revolution made them men and citizens. Glance in the salons of the new aristocracy; there, you will find many of them, all holding an honorable place. In fashionable society at Trouville, at the watering places in the Pyrenees, and on the Mediterranean, they may be seen in great numbers mingling with the most exclusive aristocracy of the world. This race, Louise, oppressed and persecuted for eighteen centuries, has reached an epoch in which its genius, released from the odious shackles that condemned it to obscurity, is not unlikely to conquer the world. Already, the part which the Jews are taking in social life entitles them to the same consideration we enjoy; and twenty years from now, when a girl like you takes an Israelite for a husband, the affair will not only fail to create any disapproval, but to use your own words, it will be considered an eminently suitable match. Rest assured, Louise, so far as I am concerned, had M. Wavre asked your hand in marriage, I should have pleaded his cause warmly, for I should not have been sorry to have you set a useful example."

Louise was silent.

"Well, I have preached you quite a sermon," continued the young officer gayly; "you must find me a terrible bore; and since this is only a suppositious case, let us continue our examination."

Louise followed him mechanically; looking at the pictures before which they paused, without seeing them, hearing none of her brother's criticisms, and answering his questions only in monosyllables.

She was completely bewildered, and she repeated her brother's assurances one by one, still unable to believe that he had uttered them. Was she really awake?

What she had just heard had completely changed the opinions of this girl who had deemed it a sacrilege, worse than a sacrilege, not to overcome her love, since it was also a disgrace in the eyes of the world.

And here was Charles, a man of rank and a strict observer of the proprieties of life, suddenly tearing away the veil, and proving that her scruples were absurd, and unworthy of serious consideration.

An hour afterwards, as they were descending the steps of the palace, they encountered a young man to whom Charles bowed smilingly.

"Good morning, Lieutenant," responded the new comer, lifting his hat.

Charles Vaconsin offered his hand.

"Let me present you to my sister, my dear sir," he said; then:

"Monsieur Octave Valastruc, my former sergeant, who was left for dead upon the plain of Avron."

When the gentleman passed on, after a few polite remarks, Charles remarked:

"There is another person who is being induced to

spoil his life by a fatality of birth. Talented, brave, and immensely rich, he might reasonably aspire to a brilliant future; but the unfortunate name of Valastruc which his father parades everywhere through the capital, provinces and foreign lands, inflicts upon him a humiliation which his vanity greatly exaggerates. He dares not aspire to any of the exalted positions which his natural intelligence and wealth would certainly enable him to attain, from a fear of competitors who would taunt him with the frenzied advertizing in which his father indulges. Here is another young man, Louise, of whom a sensible and courageous girl could make a faithful and devoted husband."

On his part, the son of the grocer exclaimed in indignant and jealous surprise:

"What! is this the girl that fool of a Godefroy is to marry. Poor child! to what misery they are condemning her!"

Then, bitterness rendering him cynical, he added:

"Upon my word, I am going to ingratiate myself into the Count d'Aitignies' good graces. It is not unlikely that his wife will need a consoler."

CHAPTER XVII.

AN UNPLEASANT PREDICAMENT.

A FEW days later, Godefroy gave a grand dinner, to celebrate, according to custom, the close of his bachelor life. It was a sumptuous repast; the table glittered with superb silver and cut glass; the odor of truffles was mingled with the perfume of choice flowers, and in spite of the great mountain of ice in an immense onyx urn the temperature of the apartment sent one's blood up to fever heat.

Indescribable disorder now reigned upon the table, which was strewn with fragments of the feast, glasses still filled with champagne, the stumps of cigars and fruit parings. Around the board sat about twenty guests smoking and drinking; some were discussing the latest bit of scandal; some were exchanging opinions upon the political situation, and a laborer as deeply under the influence of liquor as many of them, would have excited unmitigated disgust. But these gentlemen, one and all, belonged to the fashionable world, and you know as well as I, that the intoxication of wealthy persons can not be likened to that of the vulgar herd. One is a slight failing; the other is beastliness. The quality of the wines makes the difference.

Soon, the conversation became general, and any number of coarse jests were aimed at the host, in language worthy of the heroes of a realistic romance.

Either because he had imbibed less than the others and despaired of reducing them to anything like order, or because other matters demanded his attention, Godefroy left his guests just as the clock struck eleven. Going into his bedroom, he put on an overcoat and passing out by another door to avoid re-entering the salon from which came the sounds of a terrible uproar, he made his escape without taking leave of any one.

No one noticed his departure, for just at that moment the guests were boisterously singing the refrain of a so-called romance *à l'Assommoir*, which would have cost any gamin who hummed it in the streets at least one week's imprisonment.

Rejoiced at his deliverance, the abbé's protégé hastened from the house, and twenty minutes afterwards reached the house of Madame des Orniers on the Boulevard Malesherbes.

That lady was evidently expecting him.

"Here you are, at last," she remarked, extending her hand. "How are your guests?"

"All as drunk as Robespierre's executioner."

"And Grella?"

"He has had his fill. I should not be surprised if he were sleeping the sleep of the just in the midst of the uproar, greasing my sofa cushions with his pomaded head. But I do not reproach him. On the

contrary, I am so grateful for the service he has just rendered me, that I am not inclined to complain of any injury he may do my furniture."

The countess appeared satisfied, and offering Godefroy a seat beside her on the sofa, she remarked:

"Yes, thanks to my exertions, your embarrassment is at an end. The notary is satisfied, to-morrow, the mayor will perform the civil ceremony, and on the conclusion of the religious rites two days later, you will find yourself the master of a handsome fortune."

"An unexpected result, for which I am extremely grateful."

"Truly?"

"Why should you doubt my gratitude?"

"I am certainly entitled to it. Without feeling any desire to exaggerate the value of my services, and without dwelling upon the advantages which will accrue to you from this marriage, I can truly say that this alliance would have been an impossibility without my aid."

"I admit this without the slightest hesitation, and again assure you of my gratitude."

"Which you will probably prove by ignoring me in the future."

"On the contrary, I intend that you shall be a frequent and an honored guest in my household. I wish to see you there constantly, in order that you may be thoroughly conversant with all that is going on, and that I may have the benefit of your valuable advice."

The heart of the countess dilated with a secret satisfaction which her companion did not suspect in the least. She cared very little about his gratitude, or any possible influence she might exert in his household; she only desired to be received there. She had arrived at that psychological stage in which women of sullied reputations are suddenly attacked with an unconquerable thirst for respect and consideration. Naturally clear-sighted, she was not deceived in regard to the nature of the homage paid her by the frequenters of her salon. They visited her openly; assured her of their respect, and overwhelmed her with compliments and marks of deference; but not one of her most intimate friends had ever brought his wife, his sister or his mother. Her invitations to these ladies were always declined on pretexts that they endeavored to make plausible: illness, absence or previous engagements,—so many dagger thrusts to the pride of this woman who wished to entertain ladies at her house, like every one else.

Occasionally, some few of her more intimate friends invited her to visit them; but this was usually during the summer or in the country, and she almost invariably found that her entertainers were alone. One might almost say that they lived with closed doors during her stay with them; not a Parisian, not a relative, not a neighbor appeared. And what a significant reserve and circumspection were displayed by the hostess. Nothing but "Madame" from the first day to the last, in

spite of the "dear madames" the countess lavished upon the mother, and the "dear child" with which she tried to cajole the daughters. There seemed to be a wall of ice between her and these ladies—an insurmountable barrier which betrayed a silent contempt, only concealed out of obedience to the head of the family. She instinctively felt that he had said: "She must be received. It is impossible for me to do otherwise. I demand the sacrifice."

These details, not one of which escaped her notice, rendered her life most unsatisfactory; and there were hours when her failure to obtain this coveted admission into society made her almost resolve to take refuge in a convent or to plunge into the depths of infamy; but Godefroy's projected marriage opened a new field before her and revived her courage, by rendering her comparatively sure of ultimate success.

It had been this incentive which had induced her to make such superhuman efforts to insure this marriage; besides, to prevent him from deserting her, she must have some hold upon him; there must be between them some secret, the more dishonorable the better, which he would fear to have divulged, and which would place him at her mercy.

Her victory had been so easily won that it astonished, and almost alarmed her; but on reflection, her apprehensions vanished. She knew he was too simple-minded to attempt to deceive her, and too timid to incur any risk of offending her. The only thing she

had to fear was that this timidity would prevent him from being master in his own house; in which case, all her labors would be lost.

But her frequent conversations with Godefroy served to restore her confidence. Seeing that he regarded his marriage purely as a business transaction, a means of paying his debts and living comfortably, that is to say, without changing his habits or making any concessions to the wife who had enriched him except to occasionally accompany her to the theatre or to entertainments, and that, only on condition that she should adopt his tastes, consent to this mode of life and accept his friends, all his friends, Madame des Orniers, in particular, her misgivings were to some extent dispelled.

Still, crafty people are never tranquil in mind; and though Madame des Orniers was comparatively sure of Godefroy's sincerity, she resolved to sound him still further.

"Listen, baby," she said, with a smile of motherly protection. "I am satisfied of your good intentions, but you know very little about the lady who is to become your wife to-morrow. I have many enemies, as I have said before, and they will perhaps speak of me to her in disparaging terms, and she may resolve to close her doors against me, more or less publicly. It would be doing only what she has a perfect right to do, you must admit. Recollect that here is a young girl who brings you a handsome fortune, and extricates you

from a most embarrassing position. So long as you live, you will not drink so much as a glass of water that she has not paid for; that she should be resolved to choose her own mode of life, and her own associates is only natural."

"Natural or not, I once more repeat that I intend to be master in my own house, and I swear that you shall be a frequent and honored guest there."

"You swear it?" said the countess, fully reassured.

"Upon my word of honor as a gentleman!"

In her exultation she took his face in her two hands and kissed him daintily upon the cheek, exclaiming:

"You are charming."

Just then, the bell of the outer door sounded. The pair gazed at each other in evident alarm.

"Grella?" asked Godefroy in a whisper.

"Yes, Grella," replied the countess, angrily.

"What is to be done?"

Louise's future husband did not lack shrewdness, and he instantly perceived that to incense Grella just now, was to lose the use of the four hundred thousand francs which would insure the signing of the marriage contract, and make the consequent abandonment of the marriage a certainty: in short, there would be a devil of a row generally, as he elegantly expressed it, with reproaches in plenty from the canon, and a never-ending procession of creditors, rendered intractable by disappointment. This frightful prospect completely paralyzed the brain of the honest youth; and though

realizing the imperative necessity of making his escape with the greatest possible dispatch, he sat there vaguely wondering if there would be any great danger in dropping down from the window into the street.

"Go into my room," said the countess, quickly. "Take a book and do not move."

Godefroy allowed himself to be pushed into the adjoining chamber by his friend, but being in a state of mind verging on abject terror, he remained near the door, holding his breath to listen.

His disappearance was timely, for barely a second had passed when Grella entered the boudoir in which the countess was seated. Godefroy had not exaggerated in stating that the gentleman had had his fill; he had had far more. If a policeman had encountered him in the street in such a condition, and clad in a cap and blouse, he would have unhesitatingly conveyed him to the station-house. He entered with an idiotic laugh which the countess regarded as an evil omen, for how was feminine craft to triumph over the drunken obstinacy of this brutal creature; but nothing daunted, she eyed him haughtily from head to foot.

"Is it you?" she asked, as if unable to believe her eyes, "you who venture to present yourself here at such an hour?"

"Excuse me, Josephine," the lady's benefactor stammered, not without considerable difficulty.

"In the first place, I forbid you to address me by that name. My maid has not gone to bed: and I do

not intend you to put on airs that it does not please me to tolerate."

"Pardon," he said sulkily. "I was on my way home, and seeing a light in your window, I thought you would not refuse me a cup of tea."

"At half past twelve o'clock at night? You must be jesting."

"I am thirsty, terrible thirsty."

"Not from any lack of drinking, I should judge."

"It is being in the open air that has made me so. Really, I do not feel at all well."

"I am very sorry, my friend. In your present condition, sleep is the best thing for you."

"That is true; I will lie down here upon the sofa."

"Here, in my house? Oh, no; and as it would be only a waste of time for me to state my reasons, I will merely say: Go, and at once."

"Go?"

"Instantly."

"You send me away?"

"Most assuredly, and at once and without any further explanation. To-morrow, you will understand the heinousness of your offence, and you will come to make your excuses. I will then see if I feel inclined to accept them. At the present time, you are in no condition to understand me; so go, and go quickly, if you would avoid a free expression of my opinion, and of the unconquerable disgust with which you inspire me."

One of the peculiarities of intoxication is a desire to parley and argue; and Grella, who was constituted much like other people after all, attempted to advance arguments somewhat irrelevant in their nature, and when the countess checked him resolutely, he became angry.

"You need not try to play the duchess with me!" he exclaimed. "If you think you can frighten me, you are counting without your host. I intend to maintain my claim upon you against one and all. Take good care that I discover no proofs of your unfaithfulness. I am not afraid of scandal, and though it costs me a term in the penitentiary, I give you my word of honor that I will kill the first man I catch interfering between you and me."

This brute, too, talked of his word of honor with unruffled composure.

A fine position this for Godefroy who, in his place of concealment, missed not a single word of this forcible but vulgar harangue. Sometimes the blood mounted to his forehead, and he longed to rush out and bid open defiance to this barbarian; but this barbarian had placed four hundred thousand francs in his hands only the evening before, and the recollection of this fact caused the listener to restrain his ire.

When Grella finally paused to take breath in the midst of the torrent of abuse and insults that was flowing from his lips, Madame des Orniers, in a perfectly calm voice, said:

"Have you finished? Very well. Whatever your opinion of me may be, I assure you I shall not make the slightest effort to change it; but you will do me the favor to retire without saying any more on the subject. It would be a pity for such an honorable man as yourself to continue to feel any interest in me, so farewell."

Grella appeared positively thunderstruck.

"What, you make no attempt to defend yourself?" he exclaimed.

"None whatever. Go; all is over between us. I will never see you again."

"Josephine!"

His consternation satisfied her that the game was won, and without giving him any chance to utter the apologies that were evidently upon his lips, she rang the bell violently.

"The servant will show you to the door," she remarked quietly.

"But listen, Josephine—"

"Not another word," was the reply, accompanied by another energetic pull at the bell. The maid entered.

"Tell the porter to find a carriage and accompany M. Grella home. He is indisposed this evening."

"No; I need the assistance of no one," he responded in impotent rage.

His vanity was stung to the quick by the insult inflicted upon him, and drawing himself to his full height, he said in a manner which he endeavored to make withering in the extreme:

"Good evening, Madame."

"Good evening, my friend," she responded gently; then offering him her hand with a smile, she added:

"When you have recovered from the effects of your champagne, Etienne, we will talk this over in a more amicable fashion, will we not?"

He did not know what to reply. The servant stood waiting with a candle, and in her presence he did not dare to give utterance to the insult that was upon his lips, so turning upon his heel so suddenly that he was obliged to clutch at the back of an arm-chair for support, he managed to reel out of the room.

In the ante-chamber, he paused to put on his overcoat, then taking a cane that was standing in the corner of the room, though he had none with him when he came in, he succeeded in descending the staircase by keeping a tight hold on the railing, and closing his eyes to protect himself from vertigo.

Madame des Orniers waited to hear the outer door close before releasing her prisoner; but after he, in turn, had departed, she felt the need of reflecting upon the situation, in order to judge of the probable consequences of her conduct. She had been very severe to Grella, and though he was grossly intoxicated now, he might, on awaking the next morning, take what she had said literally. Under such circumstances, what might he not do? One has everything to fear from the wounded vanity of a fool! If he should regard his dismissal as final, what would prevent him from

demanding the immediate return of the money loaned to Godefroy. She shuddered at the thought. All the advantages she had expected to derive from this marriage would vanish in smoke. Fear seized her, and opening her escritoire she hastily scribbled a few words that could not fail to bring Grella to her the next morning. She must gain a few days time, in order that the marriage might become an accomplished fact. She also knew that the newly-wedded pair were to start on a journey immediately after the ceremony; hence, it was a matter of vital importance that there should be no change in her relations with Etienne, at least, not until after their departure. The letter she had written to him could not fail to produce this result; and again summoning her maid, she intrusted it to her, with orders that it should be delivered early the following morning.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MARRIAGE.

FOUR days afterwards, Pierre Wavre left his house with a comparatively light and contented heart, flattering himself that a long and persistent sorrow was almost forgotten.

On receiving an invitation to Louise's marriage, a sudden revolution seemed to have taken place in his feelings. In the presence of the accomplished fact, his melancholy, the result of a foolish hope of some absurd and impossible miracle, no more or less absurd than all miracles, however — had given place to anger; but after he had roundly cursed the stupidity of mankind and shaken his fist at society in general, he calmed down as if by enchantment.

"Ah well, so much the better," he thought. "I am released now from the thraldom of a fixed idea that benumbed my intellectual faculties."

Two or three fits of anger followed during the days that immediately ensued; but they diminished in duration and intensity; and whenever he discovered that the fixed idea still persisted in haunting him, he endeavored to banish it by spending most of his time in pursuit of amusement. Never had he been seen so frequently on the Boulevard, at the houses of his

friends, and in the social and artistic circles in which he was an honored guest; and he proved himself to be an excellent companion and the possessor of a rather excitable, but still exceedingly agreeable sprightliness of manner.

If his sister had not been at Trouville at the time, he would have called on her every day to propose some pleasure excursion; but reduced to the companionship of his brother artists, he improvised dinners, and rambles in Bois, and very willingly accompanied his friends to evening receptions, or played baccaret like the rest of them.

He wished to while away the time, to drive away thought and to escape from himself, until the day when the nuptial benediction would be pronounced, and all would be over.

At last that day had come, and a charming one it was; a storm the evening before, having cooled the air and revived the drooping foliage. He felt really brave, and after making his toilet, and finding that he still had considerable leisure at his disposal, he started on foot for the little church on the Avenue d'Eylau, in which the marriage of Louise was to be celebrated.

He chose the longest way, through the Chaussée d'Antin, the boulevards and the Champs-Élysées. Even before reaching the Arc-de-Triomphe, he observed many handsome equipages, containing handsomely dressed ladies, gentlemen glittering with decorations, and a sprinkling of uniforms, as well as of church dignitaries.

It is needless to say that all the nobility of the Faubourg Saint-Germain who had not already repaired to their estates, intended to honor with their presence the nuptials of the daughter of the Baroness Vaconsin de Bovilliers, *née* de Bèlencour; and in like manner, all who had held important positions under the Second Empire, were eager to congratulate the son of the former contractor. Add to these, the club acquaintances, the mutual friends among brokers and in banking circles, a number of more or less prominent artistic celebrities, and the remnant of what Morny in his disdainful condescension styled, "my little world," and you can form some conception of the crowd around the church.

Standing a little apart, Pierre watched the throng with a sort of astonishment mingled with an ill-defined fear which he tried to hide even from himself. It seemed to him that his secret sorrow was apparent in spite of his efforts to conceal it, and that people were watching him with a kind of pity.

Suddenly he saw a stylish dog-cart drawn by a superb blooded horse, emerge from one of the cross streets. It was skilfully driven by a tall, handsome young man, between the lapels of whose light overcoat a white neck-tie was visible.

"Look, Valastruc is in full dress," exclaimed some one standing near Pierre.

Just then, the grocer's son stopped short near those who were speaking of him, the crowd of vehicles pre-

venting him from advancing further. As he stopped the groom sprang down and stationed himself at the horse's head, and the driver in turn alighted.

"Good morning," he said gayly. "Has the wedding party made its appearance yet?"

"Are you mad? Who ever heard of a wedding at the appointed hour? Such a thing was never known."

"I am not *au fait* in such matters, I confess."

"I should judge not."

"Why?"

"By your white tie."

"Do you suppose I have gotten myself up in this style for my own gratification?"

"My dear fellow, a fashionable man never puts on a dress coat before seven o'clock in the evening."

"But I belong to the show, my friend."

"What?"

"I am best man, if you please."

"Really?"

"And no more proud on that account, I assure you."

"Then you are intimately acquainted with the Bovilliers?"

"No, with Godefroy. You think it quite a tax, I suppose, but I owed him that much. Josephine has been so good to me."

"And will *she* have the assurance to come?"

"He has invited her."

"Look, there she is now, with Grella. My boys, the *fête* is complete!"

"Are the reports on this subject true? That she brought about the marriage, I mean."

"She had a finger in the pie, undoubtedly; but you must look higher for the principal negotiator. She helped the matter along at the request of another party."

"The canon?"

"Yes, Rémondat; an old friend of her husband's family, whom she has taken care not to lose sight of, and whom she consults by letter, or even in the sacristy, on great occasions. But the most comical thing of all is that she succeeded in inducing Grella to lend the pecuniary aid necessary to effect the signing of the marriage contract."

"He is certainly very obliging."

"She persuaded him that it would be a master-stroke. You know poor Etienne is terribly jealous of Godefroy, and she convinced him that by effecting his rival's establishment in life, he would get rid of him."

"And he believed it?"

"She is so persuasive."

"In any event, this simpleton of a d'Aitignies, is a mighty lucky fellow. The bride is lovely, and one of those carefully reared girls who are so conscientious as to voluntarily love the husband selected for them by their parents."

"Bah!" exclaimed Valastruc. "Young girls are all alike. Besides, if what some of the gossips say is true, the vow she is about to pronounce is a *dernier resort*."

"Tell us all about it."

"I am not very well informed on the subject, but I have understood that last autumn some one was fortunate enough to win the love of the beautiful Louise, in spite of the care with which she had been reared, and that, had it not been for her illness there would have been a marriage which would have been a terrible blow to her noble parents."

"Who was the fortunate man?"

"I was not informed."

"Some country neighbor?"

"Some Parisian visiting at Bovilliers, more probably."

"I wonder who the baron's guests were last autumn?"

"It is an amusing and consoling thing to know that this beautiful and wealthy young lady regards our excellent Godefroy only as a *pis-aller*," remarked Valastruc. "It would have broken my heart had he been chosen for himself alone. It is bad enough for Josephine to have obstinately preferred him to us."

The conversation was interrupted by a movement in the crowd. Five landaus were passing at a slow trot; the wedding party had arrived. Pierre could not see the bride; who was ensconced in one corner of the carriage and effectually screened by her mother and one of her bridesmaids, so he made his way into the church, and stationed himself behind one of the confessionals where he could see everything that was passing without being seen.

Already, at a sign from the beadle, the organist had begun a triumphant march by which the step of the procession was to be regulated.

Every one is familiar with the details of a fashionable wedding. First, an address to the bridal couple; then music, solos rendered by operatic stars, and a high mass chanted in low tones in order not to interfere with the *virtuosos*. After which, the wedded pair wend their way to the sacristy followed by a crowd of friends eager to proffer congratulations, and then hasten home to a breakfast which will certainly be either cold or burned up.

Pierre who was deeply agitated at first, ended like the others, in finding the ceremony tedious, though he was not anxious for a seat at the breakfast table; but since the matter was virtually ended, why should he remain there to repeat: "it is over." Several times he glanced over the crowd trying to discover some opening through which he could make his way to the door; but he saw that escape was impossible: he would be obliged to incommode too many people, for the church was too small for the number of guests.

But the mass was finished at last and the bridal party disappeared, but Pierre decided to wait until part of the crowd had dispersed. As he began to think of moving, a smiling and affable gentleman barred his passage: "Not that way, not that way. You would not succeed in making your way out."

Even while he thanked him, Pierre read the charac-

ter of his interlocutor. He had fallen a victim to one of those persons whom artists and authors are obliged to tolerate, in spite of themselves; one of those courteous, cordial, well-dressed men who know all about your work, and who talk of your relatives and friends, but whom no one knows. Is he a friend of one of your acquaintances, an editor, a picture dealer, an amateur detective or a journalist? No one knows: every one has met him, but where? Has he been presented to you in some mercantile establishment with which you hold business relations? You cannot say; but he is so polite and such a man of the world, that unless you desire to pass for an unmannerly boor you must treat him courteously, answer his questions, allow him to slip his arm through yours, and endure his company, saying to yourself all the while: "Where the devil have I seen him? What *is* his name?"

"Not that way, not that way," repeated the stranger. "There is a little side door near by that will enable us to reach the sacristy without passing through the crowd."

This is another peculiarity of the class referred to. They know buildings better than the architects who constructed them; and there are no forbidden doors for them. Through a door upon which is inscribed: "No admittance," they pass without a permit, or so much as a word to the person on guard; even the door-keepers at the theatre do not question their right to enter. They are found everywhere, shaking hands

with everybody, received everywhere without cordiality but without repugnance.

Occasionally some one inquires:

"Who is that man?"

And the response is invariably:

"I have not the slightest idea."

To tell the truth, Pierre attached but little importance to the meeting just at that moment. He had been in a sort of stupor during the entire service. The conversation he had overheard between "the best man" and his friends had filled him with consternation. Poor Louise! to whom were they uniting her? What a wretched fate was in store for her!

As the ceremony progressed, it seemed to him she was approaching closer and closer to the verge of a precipice, and a wild impulse to spring forward and publicly denounce the man to whom they were uniting her, seized him; but he was prevented by an exasperating sense of his powerlessness. The priest's benediction was only the confirmation of a now irremediable misfortune, since the law had consecrated the indissoluble bond two days before. Besides, what right had he to interfere? And what proofs could he furnish? Only the conversation of two young men which he had overheard by chance!

His rage gradually abated, giving place to a profound discouragement. He had only one desire: to flee, to divert his thoughts, to forget.

At the same time the proposal to catch one more

glimpse of the bride was a sore temptation. Why not? A thousand absurd and fantastic fancies passed through his mind. Perhaps Louise had already discovered the horrors of her situation. Perhaps she already felt the need of assistance? This was all folly, to be sure; but folly which it was difficult for him, in his present state of excitement, to overcome.

So, without making any effort to rid himself of the singular person who offered his services as a guide, he allowed himself to be conducted through a narrow corridor, at the end of which was a small door, that stood open, and on crossing the threshold, he found himself only a few steps from Louise and Godefroy.

The utmost confusion prevailed in the sacristy which was filled with an eager and laughing crowd, all shaking hands, and exchanging greetings and congratulations.

The manner and appearance of Louise abruptly dispelled the young man's hallucination. Calm and serene, she replied to each friend with a tranquil grace utterly void of agitation and embarrassment.

On contemplating her, Pierre was seized with a sudden compassion for his own stupidity. How could he have fancied that she was in any danger? As she then appeared to him, and to many others, she seemed lifted high above any of the possible consequences of her changed condition.

Suddenly their eyes met, and the young man felt his courage fail him. Over the face of Louise there passed first an expression of astonishment, then a

rather melancholy smile. She made a slight movement as if to bid him approach, and as Pierre obeyed, deeply agitated, she offered him her hand:

"So you came?" she said.

It was the least I could do," he stammered. "Heretical as are my prayers for your happiness, madame, they are at least sincere."

"I am sure of it, and I am deeply grateful. You believe me, do you not?"

Pierre bowed; there was a strange choking sensation in his throat which made it impossible for him to reply in words. "And since you are here," added Louise, "I should inform you of a fact which may interest you. It is connected with the portrait you began at our house last autumn. Do you recollect it?"

"Certainly, madame."

"Ah, well, considering it alike impossible to keep it or to return it to you in its present condition, I have ordered it burned. Have I done right?"

"Yes," he replied quickly, "you have done right."

She again offered him her hand.

"Since you have invoked the protection of your God for me," she continued, "you must permit me to entreat mine to make you happy."

She had touched a sensitive spot; he was silent.

Then gently pressing the young man's hand which she still held, she said, in a tone of grave sweetness:

"Farewell."

"Farewell, madame," replied Pierre, brokenly.

CHAPTER XIX.

"BABY'S RETURN."

THE general elections were close at hand, and though public opinion was very peaceable, being certain of success, the friends of the faction in power, divining the coming downfall, were enduring torture unutterable, and hastily taking their precautions *in extremis*.

The Countess des Orniers wore the most doleful visage of all the anxious crowd. Grella, not doubting for a single instant the triumph of his party, had beguiled her into speculations which he thought could not fail to double the lovely Josephine's capital.

But the crash came; and in two days the poor lady saw nearly a third of her fortune swept away. In simple justice, Grella should have made her loss good, but nowadays, it was a difficult task to induce that gentleman to unloose his purse strings; besides, he too had met with heavy losses in the same ventures.

The salon of the countess, too, was almost deserted; the members of the defeated party who were now principally engaged in tearing each other to pieces with their sharp teeth, evincing a desire to avoid rather than meet one another.

Madame des Orniers' courage almost failed her.

The breach made in her fortune; Grella's avarice; the pecuniary embarrassment of such friends as remained faithful to her; all this necessitated a change in her style of living which aroused her furious indignation.

The winter and spring passed in this way, and poor Josephine was beginning to despair when, on returning home one day about five o'clock, she found two cards upon the tray which was held by a statue of an ape in the ante-chamber—the latest freak of fashion.

Upon one of these cards was inscribed:

Le Comte Godefroy d'Aitignies,
72 Rue Matignon.

On the other:

Madame la Comtesse Godefroy d'Aitignies.

The horizon of the lovely Josephine, so gloomy only an instant before, suddenly became suffused with the roseate light of hope. "Baby" had kept his word. Who would have believed it? She bitterly reproached herself for having suspected him of ingratitude and duplicity.

Directly after his marriage Baby had left Paris with his wife. First, they spent a week at Bovilliers; then they repaired to Austria where their best friends lost sight of them, though it was rumored that they were travelling through the Tyrol and afterwards in Italy, and they had been met by acquaintances in Venice,

Florence and Rome; but not one of Madame des Orniers' personal friends had received any direct news of them, and she, herself, had not received a single word.

Under such circumstances, it was not strange that she blushed at her credulity, and found it difficult to swallow the mortification of having been duped by that great simpleton.

And now he had once more given signs of life. He had returned, and even before she had been informed of the fact, he had come with his wife to pay her a formal visit. He was no longer a simpleton or an ingrate, he was again "Baby."

Oh! what a happy night she spent! How blissful were her dreams. He would surely relieve her of her financial embarrassment, and effect an entrance for her into a world where she would find a place worthy of her, and of her secret aspirations.

The next morning the postman brought her a letter. She recognized Godefroy's handwriting at a glance, and her heart swelled with emotion.

He wrote:

"I will come to breakfast with you at eleven o'clock. We must have a long talk. Deny yourself to all visitors, and do not think ill of me on account of my long silence. You will approve my reasons for it when I have explained them to you.

"Your 'Baby' d'Aitignies."

Louise had been Godefroy d'Aitignies' wife for nearly a year. The early months of her married life had been a series of painful surprises, to which she had conscientiously endeavored to accustom herself; but in spite of her efforts, these surprises had resulted in a disgust which caused terrible inward conflicts and half frantic revolt.

Religion, a sense of duty, reason — nothing availed. She loathed her husband. Near him, the throbbings of her heart seemed suspended; even respiration became difficult; she was obliged to shut her teeth tightly together to prevent them from chattering, and to make almost superhuman efforts to restrain the tears that rose to her eyes. This man produced upon her much the effect of a loathsome reptile, and contact with him seemed to chill her to the very marrow of her bones.

And was this marriage? Oh, the horror, the degradation of it!

Fortunately for her, Godefroy, though unconscious of her unconquerable antipathy, was intensely bored in her society. This timid, inert woman, almost sulky in her silent resignation, exasperated him, and had it depended upon him, the wedding journey would have come to a speedy termination. How impatiently he longed for the moment to return to France, and resume his old habits and meet his old acquaintances, especially his friend Josephine des Orniers. *She* was a woman worth talking about! No infernal

nonsense about her! How amusing she was! While Louise— Bah, altogether too finical for him!

So, by a sort of tacit consent, their relations became gradually more and more formal—a state of things which was eminently satisfactory to both parties. At Nice, seeing him greatly interested in a Russian lady, who was the idol of the foreign colony, she breathed a sigh of intense relief; and when Godefroy one day showed her an invitation addressed to them by the husband of this popular lady, to join a hunting party at a château some leagues distant, where they were to remain several days, Louise accepted the invitation and prepared her dresses; but when the day of departure came, she declared she was ill, insisting, however, that Godefroy should go without her, and as nothing could have suited him better, he did so, and the young wife enjoyed three long pleasant days of solitude and peace which would have restored her to health if her indisposition had been real.

On his return, her husband congratulated her on her recovery with a grace that was not habitual to him, and afterwards, pretending to believe that she required rest, he left her at home while he enjoyed himself elsewhere. The Russian lady departed for other climes, and Godefroy found other distractions which were probably even less elevated in their nature, but sufficiently amusing to enable him to endure his exile quite patiently.

The reader may ask the cause of this exile. As we

have before remarked, it was imposed by the canon. Three days before the nuptial benediction was pronounced, he learned through an anonymous letter that his spiritual son was not the owner of the sum of money he had apparently furnished, and that he was also in debt to the amount of one hundred and eighty thousand francs.

From whom did this revelation come? Godefroy at first suspected Etienne Grella, who had perhaps discovered the trick he and Josephine had played upon him on the night of the farewell dinner. But no; a letter of congratulation from Grella proved his entire ignorance of the facts of the case. The information must have come from some other source, possibly from some servant in the employ of the countess.

But the source from which it came mattered little after all; the canon knew it, that was the vexatious part of the matter; and assuming an authority that the orphan did not think for a moment of contesting, Rémondat condemned the count to remain abroad until his affairs could be adjusted. But though the abbé had heaven to aid him, he did not wholly succeed in accomplishing this fortunate result, for the notary, on receiving a demand for such a large amount of money began an investigation, and finally threatened to reveal the true state of affairs to the Vaconsins (of Bovilliers).

The presence of Godefroy became necessary to avert this deplorable result, and thus, the orders being rescinded, he once more appeared on the streets of Paris, happy and triumphant.

The clock was striking eleven when Louise's husband entered Madame des Orniers' boudoir. An unfeigned pleasure and affection was apparent in their meeting; indeed, they were affected almost to tears. They understood each other so well! They breakfasted *tête-à-tête*, with the excellent appetite common to innocent and to depraved natures. With his mouth full, Godefroy described to his friend the vicissitudes of his honeymoon. If Louise had but heard him! Josephine could not help laughing at the exclamation with which he concluded, and which he had so often repeated in secret, during his married life, though his revelations led her to make mental comparisons which were not always to his advantage.

But on the whole the situation was eminently consoling. She had not lost her influence over her "Baby," that was evident; and the assistance which he asked in overcoming the notary's scruples, and which she had promised to give, would place him even more entirely in her power than before.

"Have no fears," she said, when he had disclosed the whole situation. "Either with or without Grella's assistance, I will bring your notary to terms. Do not give yourself any further trouble, I will take charge of the entire matter, and will manage it in such a way that even Rémondat will be satisfied. He is no match for me in cunning."

"But how will you effect it?"

"What does that matter to you, provided I succeed?"

But Godefroy insisted.

"Listen," replied Josephine. "I owe your wife a call in acknowledgment of the card she left here yesterday. I will let you know when I intend to return the visit, so you can be at home. Try to induce her to invite me to dinner; I, in turn, will do everything I can to ingratiate myself into her favor; and judging from what you have told me, it will be an easy matter for me to win her confidence sufficiently to induce her to accede to whatever we desire."

Godefroy was naturally indolent, and he feared he would fatigue himself by persisting in his efforts to comprehend; besides Josephine was a genius in his eyes, so he gave her *carte blanche*.

When he left her house, about five o'clock in the evening, he descended the Avenue des Malesherbes with the step of a conquerer. He did not entirely understand Madame des Orniers' plan, but he had implicit confidence in her, so he gave himself no further anxiety as she had assured him that it would be entirely unnecessary for him to do so.

His success depended upon a single condition: that Louise should become the intimate friend of Madame des Orniers, and in Godefroy's opinion, nothing could be more simple.

He was so well pleased that he had no desire to spoil his satisfaction by returning home; so, after a walk through the Champs Élysées, he entered the club-house and dispatched a note to his wife, informing her that

he would not return to dinner. Entering the card-room, he sat down to a game of baccarat from which he rose a winner to the amount of seventy thousand francs.

"He must be unlucky in love, he is so infernally lucky at cards," gayly exclaimed Octave Valastruc, who had lost twenty thousand francs or more.

Godefroy lost his temper at once.

"Your jests are usually in very poor taste," he retorted dryly, "and this is certainly no exception to the rule."

"Good heavens! how surly you are!" replied the grocer's son, laughing. "You have won my money and I am only taking my revenge. Come, stop turning up your nose, and loan me two thousand francs so I can retrieve my losses."

Godefroy handed him the bank notes, then inquired:

"What are you going to do to-morrow?"

"Nothing in particular. Why?"

"Come and dine with us, then. Some of my wife's relatives will be there, and you can make an excuse so we can get off immediately after the dessert."

"Thanks. I will come," replied the other.

This seemed to Godefroy a simple acquiescence, but to young Valastruc, it meant far more. As has been previously remarked, he thought it a shame that such a charming girl as Louise should have fallen to that scoundrel d'Aitignies; and this invitation seemed likely to afford him the coveted opportunity to establish him on an intimate footing in the household.

CHAPTER XX.

A TRIFLING MISTAKE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

ONE morning the Countess d'Aitignies' coupé drew up before the steps leading to the waiting-room of the Western Railway Station, and she alighted fresh and blooming, pretty enough to make one involuntarily pause to gaze at her charming face, but with such an air of distinction about her, that one would scarcely venture to do it.

"At eleven, this evening," she said to the coachman who had leaned from the box to receive her order, and who lifted his hat and drove off at a snail's pace.

The lady glanced at the office where she would be obliged to purchase her ticket. There was quite a crowd before the window, and a young man who was standing in line, struck by the beauty and elegance of her appearance, offered to obtain her ticket for her.

"Thank you, monsieur," she replied graciously, handing him a gold coin. "I am going to Saint-Leu-Taverney."

The young man also understood that she wished a first-class ticket, and on giving it to her, he bowed with that peculiar respect which great ladies are wont to inspire.

"Accept my thanks, monsieur," she said, rewarding him with a smile.

Some women sure of their prestige are exceedingly affable and informal in their manners. Instinct teaches them that they incur no risk by being so. Gently and calmly they pass through the crowd, not with a queenly step — majestic demeanor seems absurd to them—but gracious and smiling, accustomed to have people give place to them at the slightest intimation of their pleasure.

Louise was one of these. Nothing embarrassed her. Without troubling herself in the least, she always found some one who was delighted to serve her, or to clear the way for her. A word, accompanied by an affable glance, and they were repaid.

She crossed the waiting room, and in obedience to the direction of an employé entered a compartment in which two gentlemen were smoking. Neither of them thought for an instant of asking permission to continue, but threw away their cigars at once.

When the conductor came to inspect the tickets, he remarked:

"You change cars at Ermont, madame."

"I know: thank you," she replied.

At Ermont, she left the car, and seeing a train standing on the other track, she proceeded towards it.

"Make haste, madame. All aboard!" cried an official. "We are late this morning."

All the compartments she glanced into were full.

The conductor seeing her hesitation, searched with her, and at last springing upon the platform, called:

"Here, madame, is a place."

He had opened the door, and she entered. She was the eighth passenger, and she apologized for disturbing the other occupants of the compartment, who seemed to have settled themselves comfortably for their journey. When she had seated herself, she glanced around at her travelling companions, and suddenly started, uttering a slight exclamation of surprise, for, at the other end of the opposite bench, she saw Pierre Wavre.

They exchanged a few words, but the train soon started, and the noise of the wheels and rattling of the windows compelled them to elevate their voices to an uncomfortable pitch; besides, there is little pleasure in talking when all one says must be heard by half a dozen strangers.

In a short time, the train stopped, and the guard announced:

"Franconville, Plessis-Bouchard."

Four passengers left the car, which enabled the young man to approach Louise.

"It is a long time since I have had the pleasure of seeing you," she remarked, "but I have heard of you through Colonel Morseux whom I sometimes meet in society, and also through the newspapers. You have been elected a member of the Institute. Will you permit me to offer you my sincere congratulations?"

And as he bowed, she continued:

"And your sister; I see her but seldom. It is not, I hope, on account of ill-health that she so rarely accompanies her husband. How is she?"

"You are very kind, madame. She is perfectly well, but her children engross most of her time. For the sake of taking them to the seaside she sacrificed her own pleasure and left my brother-in-law, who was detained in Paris by his duties."

"Where did she go?"

"To Trouville. Morseux has a villa there. I spent two months with her, hoping to console her in a measure for the absence of her husband, who could remain only from Saturday until Sunday evening. I will tell Magdalene that you were so kind as to inquire for her; she will be very grateful."

"Shall you see her soon?"

"I am going now to bid her good-bye, not at Trouville, but at Isle-Adam, where her husband is now spending his vacation, dividing his time between hunting, in which he is an amateur, and his fireside, to which he is devoted."

"To bid her good-by, you say. Are you going away?"

"I sail from Marseilles day after to-morrow for Egypt."

"Good Heavens!"

Pierre smiled.

"That is a very insignificant journey nowadays," he remarked; "indeed, it is little more than a pleasure excursion."

"That is true. Still, what an idea! What is your object?"

"To study the light there, to see people clad in other than European costume, and to accumulate a stock of sketches."

"How fortunate you are!" replied the lady. "Yes, it must be very pleasant to visit new scenes, and breathe a new atmosphere under strange skies!"

"What prevents you from doing likewise?"

"Alone?"

"No; with M. d'Aitignies."

There appeared upon Louise's face an expression of surprise, mingled with secret amusement, which reminded the young man of the smile at the Château de Bovilliers, the day the canon asked them what they thought of Godefroy, who had arrived the evening previous.

"For M. d'Aitignies," replied the countess, "the entire universe is bounded by the Boulevard des Capucines and the Faubourg Montmartre."

This conversation, commonplace as was its character, had prevented them from noticing another stoppage of the train, though the guard had announced:

"Herblay."

Two more passengers who had been the only occupants of the compartment besides themselves, had left the car; but it was not till the whistle sounded, and the train resumed its course, that Louise suddenly exclaimed:

"Where are we?"

"At Herblay, madame."

"Herblay?" she repeated. "I do not recollect the place."

Then, in a tone that had suddenly become anxious, she continued:

"I certainly have every reason in the world to find the time short; still, it seems to me I have reached my destination much sooner on my previous visits."

"Where do you stop, madame?"

"At Saint-Leu-Taverney."

"But we do not go there at all."

"What?"

"No; in a few moments we shall be at Pontoise."

"Pontoise? Impossible!"

"Yes, Pontoise."

"But how can that be when I have a ticket for Saint-Leu?"

"That can be easily explained: you took the wrong train at Ermont."

"I saw but one, and that, I was told to make haste and enter."

"There was a second, however: that of the Valmondoise line."

"A fine dilemma I am in!" exclaimed the countess rather anxiously.

"Give yourself no uneasiness," replied Pierre. "We will get off at Pontoise, and I will ascertain when the next train that connects with the Saint-Leu train leaves; and I hope you will not be compelled to wait long. Besides, a telegram will calm the fears of the persons who are expecting you."

"Fortunately no one is expecting me," replied Louise. "My nurse lives at Saint-Leu, and I intended to spend a few hours with her on my way to Enghien, where I am to dine at the house of a friend. I shall have an hour or two less to give her; but there is no great harm done."

As she concluded the sentence, the shrill whistle of the locomotive again rent the air, and the train soon paused before the pretty little station at Pontoise.

Pierre, leaving Louise upon the platform, hurried off in search of information. In a moment he returned with the superintendent of the depot.

"It is becoming a more serious matter," he remarked. "This gentleman tells me that you will be obliged to wait four hours either here or in Ermont, as you choose."

"I may as well wait here as there. But four hours in Pontoise, think of it!" she exclaimed laughing.

"If Madame is not specially desirous of stopping at Saint-Leu to-day, she can start in twenty minutes for Enghien," remarked the official politely.

"And arrive at noon for a seven o'clock dinner!" replied Madame d'Aitignies gayly. "No, thank you, gentlemen, I will wait here. As for you, Monsieur Wavre, hasten back to your train; give my kindest regards to Madame Morseux, kiss your nephews for me, and bring us some *chefs-d'œuvre* from Egypt."

"And leave you here alone? No, Madame. My sister is ignorant of my intended visit; permit me to keep you company until your departure?"

She objected a little, out of politeness; then yielding to the temptation, she said, accepting his arm:

"Very well, it shall be as you say. Are there any places of interest to visit here?"

"No, but there is a river, the banks of which are really quite picturesque."

"Then let us repair to the river's side without delay," laughed the lady.

"But have you breakfasted?" inquired her escort.

"Not yet."

"Nor have I."

"In that case, let us breakfast," cried Louise gayly. "This will serve to pass away part of the time."

"I do not know the resources of the place," remarked Pierre, "and am inclined to fear that the bill of fare will be rather meagre—"

"What of that! Come, I am famishing, and shall enjoy anything in the shape of food."

CHAPTER XXI.

A STRANGE AVOWAL.

THE plan was carried into immediate execution. Near the depot, they found a hotel where they were nicely served in a private room; moreover, the novelty of the adventure inclined them to accommodate themselves to circumstances, and they ate and chatted in a manner entirely devoid of constraint. It seemed to them that they were in a far off country, hundreds of leagues from their homes. No one here knew them; no one even knew where to look for them; a fairy's wand seemed to have suddenly transported them to the furthermost ends of the earth. It was a sort of *entr' acte* in their lives. There was no longer countess or painter, Catholic or Jew; they were two friends whom chance had led to play truant in each other's company.

They both experienced a delightful sense of freedom, and showed it. They also appeared wonderfully happy. But why? It was hard to say. The short-lived romance of former years seemed to be entirely forgotten; seemed to be a thing of the past to which neither of them felt any desire to revert. They were both in the best of spirits, and laughed gayly over the strangeness of their adventure.

The repast ended, they left the hotel arm in arm,

going straight on up the steep street. Though not by any means inclined to indulge in a description of Pontoise, we shall venture to remark that it is a charming place. The town is built on a ledge that towers high above the surrounding plains, and overhangs the Oise, which is of very considerable width at this point. The streets are almost perpendicular, some of them being little more than staircases bordered with houses built against the rock. From the summit of the hill, there is a magnificent view of the laughing valley that lies between the forest of Montmorency and the wooded hills that stretch from Herblay to Sannois, and of the valley of the Seine in which lies Conflaus, Maisons Laffitte, and in the distance, the forest of Saint Germain; the whole, forming a lovely panorama through which the Seine and the Oise pursue their winding way.

It was the first week in October, and the weather was warm and pleasant; a season one appreciates fully, foreseeing the speedy approach of the cold storms of autumn. The russet fields, the thousands of apple-trees still loaded with fruit, their dark green foliage varied here and there by the gaudy leaves of the chestnuts, which were almost ready to fall, all imparted a quiet picturesqueness to the landscape.

On reaching the brow of the hill, Louise and her companion paused and silently contemplated the beautiful panorama that stretched before them. Their pleasure was shadowed by a tinge of sadness, occa-

sioned by a sudden recollection of the past and of their present situation. Louise, to drive away this feeling of melancholy, suddenly straightened herself up, and said:

"Ah well! shall we not go on?"

"Certainly," replied Pierre, rousing himself from his reverie.

Midway in their descent, they came upon a winding street half of which was taken up by a limpid stream that ran swiftly along; a little stream it is true, but cleverly utilized by those living near it. All along its banks stood laundries, mills and manufacturing establishments worked by the water-power thus afforded. Louise and Pierre followed it in its windings until they reached the river bank, where they sank down upon the sward in the shade of some tall poplars that screened them from the sun as effectually as a curtain would have done.

They sat there some time in silence. Louise beheaded all the blades of grass within her reach with the end of her parasol, while Pierre, seated *à la Turque*, uprooted some late blooming marguerites. Both watched the flowing of the river in which each of them occasionally threw a pebble.

"So you are going away," Louise said suddenly. "I envy you. I wish I were a man."

"And why?"

"So I could go with you."

Pierre did not reply for a moment, prevented from

asking a possibly imprudent question by fear of appearing to take an unfair advantage of the situation; but finally he ventured to ask:

"Are you not satisfied with your lot?"

"Have I complained?"

"No;—but—"

"But what?"

"I dare not say what I was going to."

"Bah! Go on."

"Are you not happy?"

She smiled sadly.

"Are you not?" he persisted, with a sincere regret which touched her deeply.

"My friend Pierre," Louise replied, compelling her lips to continue to smile, "do you know anything more ignoble than a dupe who blames others for her own folly?"

"What do you mean?" demanded the young man resolutely.

She, in turn, became serious.

"How can I explain?" she replied. "I can blame no one but myself, if I have ruined my life out of deference to axioms which I had not investigated." Then she continued more earnestly: "Ah, yes, I have ruined it irretrievably, and I sometimes ask myself why God did not preserve me from the pitiable blunders I have made, me, who trusted so implicitly to his mercy and goodness in all things? What have I done to deserve such a fate? If you but knew—"

"Tell me, I entreat you?"

"What good would it do?"

"I might perhaps be of some service; who knows?"

"Impossible," replied Louise quickly, "impossible, and I did very wrong to make any allusion to this subject. Once more, I repeat that if my life is devoid of charm, and if fate has nothing pleasant in store for me, it is my own fault; and I am proud enough and courageous enough to accept with resignation the future I have prepared for myself. Will you not forget what I have said? I shall be very grateful if you will. Let us talk of anything except myself."

As she spoke, she sprang up, and he followed her example. She took his arm again, and they walked on for some time in silence.

"Let us talk of yourself, rather," she said at last, "of your work, and the successes that are awaiting you. What is your ambition in life? Is it possible for one to be of service to *you* in any way?"

"I am an odd sort of a fellow, perhaps," said Pierre with pretended cheerfulness, in order that she might not regret this meeting. "I aim high, but I shall not be satisfied unless I reach the goal unaided."

"You would feel humiliated, then, if you were in any way indebted to me, I suppose?"

"To you, no; but to any of your friends, certainly."

She did not reply. They were walking slowly, each solicitous in regard to what the other might think. This promenade which had begun so joyously, threatened to end gloomily.

"What time is it?" inquired Louise, suddenly.

Pierre glanced at his watch and found that it was too late for her to catch the train which connected with that going to Saint-Leu.

"I am extremely sorry, he said, "and I beg a thousand pardons for my carelessness."

"It does not matter; I can go to see my nurse some other time. How long will it be before a train leaves which will take me to Enghien in time for dinner?"

"Nearly two hours."

"And how much longer will you be obliged to wait?"

"The same length of time."

"Ah well! let us spend these two hours together here, lost, forgotten, and unknown. We are very comfortable, are we not? and a similar opportunity is not likely to present itself again. Let us return to the spot where we were sitting a moment ago. I am sorry now, that I did not reply frankly to the question you asked me. What is the use of being silent in regard to my misery, when you have divined it? Why should we pretend to have forgotten that day when we read each other's hearts? Such a farce is unworthy of us. Let us return, Pierre, I know you, and incur no risk in confessing all to you."

They soon reached the place where they had seated themselves on the bank to rest, a short time before.

"This is the place," said she. "There are the flowers you gathered. Sit down and listen to me."

Then, in a calm voice, she gave him an account of her life since she had consented to marry, and all she now knew about the man who had been chosen for her.

Only a few days before, the notary, alarmed at Godefroy's renewed demands for money, had called on the young wife and informed her of the stratagem to which her husband had resorted to conceal the loss of his fortune.

"You will understand, I think, that I care nothing about the money," she said to Pierre, "but to see one's self bound for life to a man one can not but despise! All the ties between us are broken, of course; still, to live under the same roof with him, to sit opposite him at the table, to sometimes appear in society on the arm of a man who has made use of fraudulent means to win you, is truly horrible. I can find no words to describe the extent of my humiliation. Still, I solemnly assure you, my friend, that I have not been hard to please; my ambition was exceedingly modest. At an early age I renounced the dreams in which young girls are wont to indulge, and which envelop marriage in a cloud of romance. No Prince Charming haunted my brain: I understood the obligations entailed by my position. Without enthusiasm, but with a not uncheerful resignation, I made up my mind to be content with temporal advantages, and a tame and monotonous existence. I knew very well that a husband of my own rank would be selected for

me; a person who, after what is called a gay life, felt the need of settling down, and of perhaps repairing the inroads made upon his fortune. I reconciled myself to this prospect without any great difficulty, for I hoped that I could entertain a feeling of friendship and esteem for the husband my parents would choose for me, and that I should have a home to which I should become attached through my children. Tell me, Pierre, was this asking too much? Ah, well! my husband is destitute alike of honor and integrity. Worse still," she added, carried away by indignation, "he is an insolent and brutal wretch who defrauds and insults me!"

As she uttered these words, sobs choked her utterance, and she buried her face in her hands. The young man seized them, and, livid with anger, looking deep down into her eyes, angrily exclaimed:

"He dares insult you—*you?*"

She was frightened at the effect her words had produced, and made no response.

For a moment they stood there anxious and agitated; then Louise, shaking her pretty head, said, with a faint though grateful smile:

"How weak I have been! You are the last person to whom I should have confided these villanies."

"Why?"

"Because you have loved me, Pierre," she replied, bravely; "because you still love me, perhaps; and I am only adding to your sorrow unnecessarily, since it

is not admissible for you to try to ameliorate mine. Forgive me, my friend."

She attempted to rise, but he detained her.

"Yes, it is true that I love you," he said, in a low, grave voice, "and the fact that this passion has resisted all my efforts to conquer it in the past, convinces me that I shall never overcome it. Still, do not fear that I indulge in any foolish chimeras: I know that what separates us now will always separate us; but though I hope for nothing in the future, it is a pleasure to me to still cherish the sentiments I felt for you. I will say once for all, Louise, they are such that there is nothing I would not brave to deliver you from such a terrible martyrdom, nothing, do you understand me?"

"Yes," she replied, "and I thank you."

They slowly wended their way back to the town without another word. On reaching the station, they found the train Louise was to take, standing upon the track. Night was coming on, and the waiting-room was dark and gloomy. Seating themselves in a corner, they awaited the moment of separation with hearts throbbing with emotion.

People were talking noisily around them; men were calling each other; women were issuing recommendations to those they were leaving behind them; children were running about, laughing and quarrelling. Louise and Pierre were unconscious of the confusion around them: the time seemed neither long nor short. They were aware of but one thing, that they were together.

At last a bell rang, and some one cried:

"Passengers for Paris, all aboard!"

The door opening upon the platform was thrown open. Pierre offered his hand to Louise: she took it, pressed it an instant, then with an impulsive movement attempted to raise it to her lips, but Pierre checked her, and drawing her gently towards him, kissed her upon the forehead, without a word.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MYSTERY EXPLAINED.

THE persons with whom Louise was to dine that day, owned at Enghien, on the shores of the lake, one of those grotesque structures which draw down so much ridicule on the heads of certain individuals who have acquired large fortunes in trade. In fact, it bore a striking resemblance to the *chefs-d'œuvre* in pastry which confectioners display in their shop-windows, it being a castle with battlemented towers and dormer windows in imitation granite, which seldom failed to excite the laughter of passers by.

The owners, M. and Madame Lambertyn, were not guilty of the breach of good taste manifested in its construction, however. Madame, having been attacked by a throat trouble, her physician had ordered a sojourn at Enghien, so they looked for a house and this being the only one for sale in the immediate vicinity of the lake, they purchased it.

"It is hideous!" cried Madame.

"Very true," replied her husband. "But what difference does it make?"

In fact, it made no difference.

Their whole character was revealed in this exclamation: "What difference does it make?"

This Lambertyn *ménage* was a type.

Married at an early age, equally rich, and on much the same footing so far as education was concerned, the husband and wife speedily came to a very comfortable understanding, and the absence of children compelled them to depend so much upon each other, that they finally arrived at a state of cohesion which was mistakenly regarded as love, for they were both utterly incapable of loving anybody or anything. They were comrades, rather than husband and wife; two jolly comrades who went everywhere, and entertained everybody, without meddling in anything, and, indifferent to everything. Whether the country was at war or at peace, mattered little to them. "What difference does it make?" Only they were going to see the end of it.

The same careless philosophy governed them in everything.

"You remember Mr. Smith?"

"The one who dined here the other day?"

"Yes. Well, they say he is a most disreputable person."

"Ah!"

"And his wife is of the same stamp."

"Indeed!"

And that was all. They regarded public scandal with the same indifference; not that it excited their indignation; on the contrary, they smacked their lips with delight over each tid-bit. Prying as weasles, they took the greatest pains to learn all the ins and outs,

and whys and wherefores of everything, delighted to say:

"That is all a mistake, my dear. Listen to me, I will tell you."

No one could tell *them* anything. Whatever might have happened they had seen and understood it all. They had been there.

They seemed to really care but for one thing, notoriety, whether enviable or unenviable. Any person who was talked of in the newspapers, immediately became their idol. They gave his acquaintances no rest until they were introduced to him. He was invited to each of the entertainments of which they were so lavish in Paris, as well as in the country; they overwhelmed him with attentions, asking nothing in return except that he would show himself at their house; though after a little madame would cautiously produce her album for him to inscribe his name there, as a traveller enters his name on the book at an inn.

A curious book, this album. There were many pages illustrated with pen and pencil in such a manner that the gentleman had put a silver padlock upon it. Many of these autographs unquestionably displayed a scanty respect for the mistress of the house, but what difference did that make? Each name was that of a celebrity, think of that.

Louise reached the house about half past six, and found it full of guests, all enjoying themselves as much as it is possible for people to enjoy themselves. In the

salons, in the garden, upon the lake, the guests were laughing, chatting and flirting with the greatest *abandon*. A strange change for the countess after the day spent at Pontoise, and the silent farewell which had affected her so deeply.

"Thank Heaven, you have come at last!" exclaimed Madame Lambertyn, on perceiving her. "We were beginning to despair. My husband just remarked to me: 'The party is a failure.' Every one felt so anxious for fear you would not come."

The good lady did not mean a word of this, these exaggerations being in vogue with every one.

"You are really too kind," replied Louise. "What led you to suppose that I was not coming?"

"Your husband's letter excusing himself on the plea of business. We feared something had occurred which would detain you as well."

"M. d'Aitignies' business is not always mine," replied Louise, smiling.

"Upon which fact, I congratulate you," murmured Octave Valastruc, bowing profoundly.

Louise could not help laughing.

"I see that he has a valuable friend in you," she remarked.

"I, his friend? Do you believe that, because you see me give him my hand—only when I have gloves on, remember."

"Confess that you show strange taste in your choice of a confidant."

"I would say the same to him."

"With impunity?"

"Ah, madame, do you still cherish any illusions?" exclaimed the young man, laughing.

"Not in regard to you, assuredly."

"You are very severe."

"It is your own fault."

"No; it is prejudice and distrust on your part. You see that I am paying court to you, and you treat me rudely to discourage me."

"How could I do otherwise?"

The sound of a bell interrupted this sparring.

Dinner was ready.

"Will you do me the honor to take my arm?" inquired the young man.

Louise recollected that she had leaned upon that of Pierre only a few hours before, and it seemed almost profanation to accept that of Octave.

"No," she replied, "your manner displeases me."

"I ask it, madame, as a charity."

"I have my own poor, sir."

The dinner, apart from the daintiness of the viands, and the magnificence of the service, was a remarkable one. Among the guests there were several lions who were creating a great stir in Parisian society at the time. One, a man of medium stature with a sharp and angular profile, bilious complexion, and beardless as a priest, with long, straight, black hair, talked with a nervous volubility that ended by irritating one almost

beyond endurance, such presumption did he display in his manner of discussing every subject. Like other *parvenus*, who do not feel themselves entirely deserving of their good fortune, he was so intoxicated by his success that he pretended to consider himself without a rival; and to see his *confrères* still esteemed, excited his furious wrath; but in spite of his astonishing assurance, a vague uneasiness haunted him, and caused him many a sleepless night. Notwithstanding his determined blindness, he began to see signs that his popularity was on the wane, that the public was beginning to lose interest in him, as if it had learned to know him too well, and as if he had already given proofs of his incompetency. The letters he published in the journals no longer created the *furore* which had formerly made him the king of the Boulevard for an entire week.

A grave crisis this, for the spoiled children of fashion! When the agitation that surrounds them subsides a little, they see those they had despised pursuing their way, and quietly ascending higher and higher. Poverty again threatens them; poignant regrets torture them; they perceive the dark gulf of oblivion towards which they are gliding, in spite of all their efforts, and they feel that the public, once their fanatical admirer, almost repents of its enthusiastic praise. In the same journal that had repeated their every word, and devoted two columns to a description of them in their dressing-gowns, they find a severe

criticism on the disparity between their merit and their popularity; and even in the cafés where their names had formerly been pronounced with awe, they encounter only disdainful, though good-natured sneers. The principal lion now seated at the Lambertyn's table as yet, had this only to fear; but having attained the summit of his ambition, he was tormented by an apprehension that he would not be able to retain his place, that he would prove himself unequal to his position. Every one was watching him; at least, he thought so, and being about to issue a new work, he was constantly scenting hostility in the air.

Another guest, who was for the moment playing the spy on him, and who thoroughly detested him, was a tall, stalwart, bearded, pugnacious man, who talked very loud, ate ravenously, and never minced words.

He, too, was an author who had spent his youth in the beer-shops of Bohemia, studying the manners and sentiments of his contemporaries in the vulgar crowds that congregate in such places. One fine day, finding that his writings failed to win favor, he rolled up his sleeves, and boldly undertook to picture human depravity in its most revolting aspect. The success of his first work of this kind surpassed his wildest hopes. The number of editions mounted so high that he completely lost his head, and began to regard himself as a great man, and the founder of a new school.

The presence of these celebrities delighted the Lambertyns; and every one incited them to display

their skill in argument, and give an exhibition of their talents for the amusement of the distinguished company. But no; neither of them dared attack the other; and with a courtesy more prudent than sincere, they yielded each other a mutual support which was intended to prove them the best of comrades.

Louise was astonished, for the criticisms young Valastruc murmured in her ear seemed to her infinitely more brilliant and witty than their conversation. Soon, she ceased to listen entirely, and assuming an affable air, she said to Octave:

"Tell me, are you inclined to reply honestly to a question I wish to ask you?"

"That depends," he rejoined lightly.

"Do not jest. Your manner towards me humiliates me, and wounds my pride. You do not intend to do this, I know—"

"On the contrary, since I am paying court to you."

"You have made that remark before; and it is on this subject I wish to speak to you, and I desire you to answer me truthfully. Why do you pay court to me?"

"Is it possible that you have never seen your own face?"

"I am not asking for compliments. I only wish to know why an intelligent and well-bred man like yourself should feel any desire to pay court to me. A man treats only such women as he does not respect in such a manner. Am I among the number? And

what has led you to form such an estimate of my character?" Octave appeared slightly abashed.

"Listen, sir," she continued. "I forgive you in advance, whatever your answer may be. I do not understand, and I wish to know the opinion you have formed of my character. I swear that I will not take offence. Will you enlighten me on this point that so puzzles me?"

"This is a very delicate matter, madame," replied the young man in an entirely different tone.

"Do you refuse?"

"No."

"Tell me, and I shall be greatly obliged to you."

Octave hesitated a moment. There was so much frankness in the lady's manner that he was vaguely tempted to content himself with asking her to pardon him for his stupidity; but it is not with impunity that one becomes acclimated to what is known as the upper classes, and he speedily overcame the embarrassment which had seized him. He admired this lady, and he fancied that any revelation he might make in regard to her husband's derelictions would advance his own interests; besides, it did not displease him to have his revenge on one of the noblemen who had sometimes made him feel that they honored him infinitely by admitting him into their society. It was pleasant and consoling to be able to show these high and mighty personages that young Valastruc was not so greatly dazzled as they had supposed.

"Our hostess is about to leave the table," he replied; "permit me to take you out upon the terrace, and there, madame, I shall place myself at your orders."

"First of all," began Octave on reaching the terrace which overlooked the lake, and from which the other guests were frightened away by the dampness; "I humbly apologize. I have committed a terrible blunder in speaking to you in a manner which has prejudiced you against me. But frankly, is it my fault?"

"What?"

"Am I alone to blame, I mean. In a word, are you sure you do everything possible to protect yourself from such attentions?"

"Do you pretend that I encourage them?"

"You expose yourself to them, at least."

"I?—"

"Unconsciously, and in spite of yourself, I know very well; but the effect is the same, and you are right to be charitable to such as offend."

The moonlight shone full on the young man's face. Louise looked at him closely and could not doubt his sincerity.

"I confess that I do not understand you at all," she said at last. "In what way do I expose myself to this danger, as you say? Tell me, since, as you yourself admit, I am ignorant of it."

"As I said before, this is a very delicate subject," re-

plied Octave, with feigned hesitation. "But why do you tolerate around you persons in regard to whose character you alone have any doubts? How can you permit a woman like Josephine des Orniers to appear in your salon, to pretend to be your friend, and soil your glove with her touch. Even if you know nothing in regard to her past or her present situation, your instinct must tell you plainly enough that she is only an adventuress. What can you suppose any one will think when he sees among your personal friends a woman who, without severing her relations with your husband, labored to bring about your marriage, and who succeeded in doing so by compelling another admirer, Etienne Grella, to furnish the money of which the contract assumed your husband to be possessed?"

Louise made no response.

"What one *must* think," added the young man, "what one has a right to think, is that you are fully aware of the situation, and utterly indifferent to it; and from the manner in which you and your husband live, meeting oftener in the houses of others than under your own roof, one is led to suppose that you have regained your liberty. And why not? You are young, beautiful and charming, and one can not help feeling that you might be induced to accept a devotion and affection which you have missed in your domestic life."

"Thank you," replied Louise, without seeming to notice the insinuations contained in the last sentence

uttered by the young man, "thank you, and allow me to say for your benefit, monsieur, that I was entirely ignorant of my husband's relations with Madame des Orniers. Abbé Rémondat introduced me to her before my marriage. I met her first at a ministerial soirée, under the last cabinet. He even alluded to her in very complimentary terms as the victim of an ill-assorted marriage. For this reason, I did not hesitate to receive her. As for the pecuniary difficulty, my notary found it necessary to inform me of that some days ago; but I was not aware that this woman had furnished him with the means to effect the deception. Moreover, I do not hesitate to tell you that what is to all intents and purposes a separation has taken place between my husband and myself; but since this state of affairs places me in a position in which I am exposed to invidious remark, in short, compromises me and imperils my good name, I shall ask the law to protect me by freeing me as soon as possible from this degrading bondage."

"You intend to apply for a divorce then?"

"Certainly."

"Then—"

"What?"

"Make haste."

"Why? Explain; I promise that your name shall not appear in the suit."

"Ah, madame," said Octave with a sort of careless disdain, "if my testimony can be of the slightest

service in any way, do not hesitate to use it; it will not make the slightest difference to me. And since you have decided to apply for a separation, enter your petition as soon as possible, if you wish to save any remnant of your fortune. Quite recently, in consequence of the fall of the late ministry, the Countess des Orniers met with serious losses. Your husband, out of gratitude, has undertaken to repair them, and to effect this, he is negotiating loans on your common property which threaten you with absolute ruin."

"If that could be made the price of my ransom, I would offer no opposition," replied Louise; "but I must have some guarantee of that. Still, I thank you anew."

"Will you pardon me? Will you permit me to remain your friend?"

Louise offered him her hand. He pressed it in a manner that displeased her greatly, and she surmised that Octave's revelations had been more interested than charitable in their nature; still, she had gained much valuable information. She left him and returned to the drawing-room to take leave of Madame Lambertyn.

"What, going already?" her hostess exclaimed. "You are fastidious, my dear; it would surprise our great men this evening if they suspected your indifference. What do you think of them? Rather dull, eh? I think myself that I made a mistake in assembling several of them; they seem to be under a constraint, and are not nearly as entertaining as usual.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CRISIS.

WHEN Louise reached home, still almost stunned by Octave Valastruc's revelations, instead of allowing her maid to aid her in undressing, she requested her to go and see if the count was at home.

The girl soon returned, saying:

"Monsieur has gone to Havre, and will not be back until to-morrow evening."

Louise, who had desired to have an immediate explanation, was greatly disappointed at first; but afterwards, she congratulated herself on her husband's absence, as it would give her time to view the situation calmly, and to recover from the anger that might carry her beyond the bounds of moderation.

She went to bed, determined to decide upon a plan of action; but she soon found that it was impossible to concentrate her thoughts upon this subject. The recollection of the hours spent at Pontoise distracted them; all that had passed there recurred again and again to her mind. Once more, she heard Pierre's words, and the sound of his voice still rang in her ears like the strains of some exquisite melody which had touched her inmost soul; again, she saw the streets through which she had passed, leaning on his arm,

and the whole seemed a delightful dream. At last she fell asleep, murmuring the name of Pierre, with a faint smile upon her lips.

The next day was her reception day, the one day of the week for which she made no engagements in order that her friends might call with a certainty of finding her at home. The events of the evening before made her regret the coincidence. She tried to think of some excuse for closing her doors, and escaping from social obligations, which she was in no mood to fulfil; but what pretext should she give? She could devise none.

She hoped that no one would come. In October, social relations are still suspended. It is the fashion to lead a country life; hunt during the day, and act charades or dance to the music of the piano in the evening. It is not "*good form*" to resume Parisian habits.

Nevertheless, quite a crowd appeared about two o'clock; a number of ladies being eager to recount their adventures at Dieppe, Trouville, Trèport and the other watering places, to which Parisians resort on the plea of health.

There were also many unmarried men of all ages, some of whom were merely trying to kill time by paying calls; while others, elegant specimens of the *swell* of the day, were in pursuit of fresh conquests.

Guest had succeeded guest without a moment's cessation, when about four o'clock, the footman announced:

"The Countess des Orniers."

The heart of Louise ceased to beat and she became frightfully pale; but by a sudden effort of will, she succeeded in maintaining a smiling face and a calm, unruffled brow. She had suddenly resolved to punish the offender in the most decisive manner.

"Good morning, my dear," said the countess on entering. She was dressed in perfect taste, and her manner showed that she felt herself on safe ground. One might even have supposed she was in her own house; still, she seemed slightly surprised that her hostess did not rise from her chair to receive her. A mere trifle, it is true.

"Are you ill?" she inquired.

"No, only a little tired," replied Louise. "I dined yesterday with the Lambertyns at Enghien; and all the bustle and excitement there fatigued me."

"It was a brilliant party, I suppose."

"As their entertainments always are."

"I was not able to go, to my great regret. This is the third time I have been obliged to decline their invitation. They will end in forgetting me."

"By no means; your ears must have burned last evening?"

"Why, did any one speak of me?"

"A great deal."

"Really?"

"You need not doubt it."

"Then you, my dear friend, must have been the speaker."

"No; on the contrary I was a listener, but naturally a very interested listener on hearing the part you played in my marriage."

"I?"

"Come, come, do not display so much modesty, my dear."

Then, turning to her other visitors, she added in the same tone in which she would have related a good joke:

"Know, my friends, that when the time came to sign the marriage contract, poor M. d'Aitignies could not imagine what saint to apply to, in order to replace the fortune which he was supposed to possess, but which he had in reality scattered to the four winds, in all sorts of dissipation. Fortunately, Madame des Orniers took compassion on him. Did you not, my dear?" said Louise, laughing.

"But—" began Josephine, a prey to the greatest perplexity.

She did not know what to think. Louise's apparent gayety prevented her from reading her secret thoughts. Did she really take it so philosophically? She was not sure, and consequently did not know what course to pursue in order to escape from this most unpleasant predicament. To indignantly protest against a fact which the person most interested seemed to regard as a mere peccadillo, seemed likely to aggravate the situation, from which she fancied she might still extricate herself by a falsehood or a half-laughing repartée.

"Come, come," interrupted Louise with admirably feigned mischievousness of manner, "you *did* take compassion on him, do not deny it. This is proved indubitably by the fact that you persuaded M. Etienne Grella to loan for twenty-four hours the sum which our imprudent Godefroy must show to the notary at all hazards."

"You are mistaken," replied Josephine, who had lost her wits completely, and who was now seeking salvation in a general and determined denial. "Yes, you are mistaken, and I have been shamefully slandered. It is not the only calumny that has pursued me, and without danger, as women who are separated from their husbands can be defended by no one."

Louise still smiling, interrupted her.

"Take care, my dear," she said. "A person of your shrewdness should not be guilty of the mistake of relating her misfortunes."

Entirely deceived by the careless tone of her young hostess, Josephine continued:

"Undoubtedly this is an inopportune moment to convince you of my entire innocence in this matter; but my regard for my pride and my reputation, compels me to furnish proofs of it."

"Pray do nothing of the kind! Why should you give yourself the trouble?"

"Pardon me," replied Madame des Orniers, vehemently. "Though you, in your natural honesty, scorn to listen to such calumnies, I owe it to myself and to

others, to refute them, if only for the sake of my reputation."

Louise laughed aloud.

"Hear, hear!" she exclaimed, "she takes the thing tragically! Why, no one expects you to defend yourself: no one thinks of reproaching you. Do you suppose that I care anything about it? Why do you assume such imposing airs and choose such grandiloquent words? Can you not see that the story amuses me, and that I admire the expedient? It certainly betrays great originality on the part of the inventor. But what is greatly to your honor, as you say, is to have persuaded Grella that by lending you his aid in this stratagem, he would rid himself of a rival."

One can imagine the embarrassment of the spectators of this scene. A silent and oppressive consternation reigned, though the lovers of scandal experienced not a little secret exultation.

The last word had scarcely fallen from the lips of Louise, when Madame des Orniers, unable to endure longer the curious and disdainful glances of those around her, sprang up. Anger, shame, and rage at her defeat choked her utterance. Had it not been for the presence of witnesses, she might have given full vent to her passion; as it was, she moved towards the door with ominous calmness, and bowing with an air of bravado, said:

"*Au revoir*, madame.

"Oh, no," replied Louise with smiling contempt, "farewell, my dear."

The door had scarcely closed when those present burst forth into a storm of eager and enthusiastic applause.

"Bravo! my dear child," repeated the ladies. "You set an excellent example, calculated to destroy the culpable apathy of such persons amongst us as tolerate the companionship of disreputable women simply from a regard for decorum. But what will be the result when she tells M. d'Aitignies that you have publicly turned her out of the house? Have you taken the necessary precautions? Have you the means of defending yourself? If matters come to the worst, can you count upon your family? In any case, we are at your service; you can depend upon our support and that of our relatives and friends."

"I thank you," Louise replied quietly. "I hope, however, that there will be no public scandal."

At half past six, Godefroy's coupé, which had gone to the Saint-Lazare station to meet him, entered the court-yard.

Louise was certain that her husband had come straight to the house without seeing the countess; consequently, he must be ignorant of what had occurred during the day.

Still it could scarcely be possible that Josephine had not sent him some message.

In fact, on entering his own room, Godefroy received from the hands of his valet an envelope containing Madame des Orniers' card, with a line written in a

trembling hand, requesting him to come to the Boulevard Malesherbes at once, without fail.

He frowned, hesitated an instant, then making up his mind, opened his blotting-case and wrote:

"My Good Josephine:

"The first thing that must be done now, is to obtain my wife's signature. I have just returned from Havre, where I have investigated every detail, and I understand the situation better than you can. When I have an opportunity to explain all, you will see that it was absolutely necessary to postpone our interview.

"I have convinced the gentlemen, by dint of much persuasion, and have obtained their consent to the desired arrangement on the express condition that the first payment shall be made by seven o'clock in the evening, at the very latest, day after to-morrow.

"I have had a great deal of difficulty, I assure you, in effecting this arrangement, and it would be the height of imprudence to incur any risk of defeat by an hour's delay; but if Louise's signature can be obtained this evening, all that it will be necessary for us to do to-morrow, will be to take the deeds to a broker, who will at once negotiate a loan upon them. He can let us have the money by nine o'clock the next morning, and we can telegraph the parties in Havre that it will be forwarded by the noon-day train.

"I am unable to say at what hour of the night I shall be able to bring you this signature which will

enable me to repay a little of your kindness to me, and to release you from the odious protectorate of Grella. Ah, my dear Josephine, what a consolation this will be to me! You will never know what it has cost me to endure the society of that vulgar man, and his tiresome conversation, to say nothing of the insulting familiarity of his manner towards you. If I succeed in this scheme, we shall both be rid of him forever; you will have no further need of him, and I swear that you shall live as you please.

"So, when I see you this evening, no matter how late it may be, I shall have effected our deliverance, which will be the best proof of the unalterable devotion of

"Your Big Baby,

"GODEFROY D'AITIGNIES."

He signed his full name as a mark of esteem, knowing that women of doubtful reputation are extremely sensitive on this point. The letter sealed, he ordered it delivered at once. He no longer thought it necessary to take any precautions; all his servants were aware of his intimacy with the countess, and he troubled himself very little about their comments.

Having done this, he made his toilet in the best of spirits, and just as the clock struck seven, he entered the drawing-room, courteous and gallant to an unusual degree, and offered his arm to his wife to escort her to the dining-room, the footman having just announced that dinner was on the table.

"This was your reception day," he remarked. "Did you have many visitors?"

"More than I expected."

"Who called?"

She mentioned the names of several acquaintances, and he made some inquiry in regard to each of them.

"Is she well?"

"Perfectly."

"And her children?"

"They are charming."

"Did they return to the city with her?"

"Yes, in time for the opening of school."

One would have thought this a model household. At dessert, Godefroy asked carelessly:

"Are you going out this evening?"

"No."

"Can you give me a moment?"

"Certainly. Why?"

"I would like to speak to you on an important matter."

"Very well."

"It will not bore you too much?"

"Why should you suppose so?"

"You are very kind, my dear."

"I am certainly very grateful for your praise, Godefroy; but I really do not deserve it, for I also desire to speak to you in regard to certain matters of no little importance."

Louise had laid down her napkin.

"Will you take your coffee in my room?" she added, rising. "Have you any cigars?"

"Will you allow me to smoke?"

"Yes, for once. Are you coming?"

She led the way to her own room, and motioning him to an arm-chair near the fire, which was blazing merrily, she rolled a little table towards him for the tray containing the coffee equipage which a servant had just brought in.

Before seating herself, she poured out a cup for her husband.

"Thanks," said Godefroy, sweetening it, "but will you not take some, Louise?"

"A *canard*, if you please; that is all I dare allow myself when I desire to sleep."

The count gallantly soaked a lump of sugar in his cup and offered it to her on his spoon. Instead of taking it in the tips of her fingers, the young wife raised the spoon to her lips, then returned it to her husband, after which she scratched a match and carried her condescension so far as to aid him in lighting his cigar, the end of which he had already bitten off.

This courteous familiarity would certainly have convinced any casual observer that the best of feeling prevailed between the young couple.

Godefroy really experienced a singular but decidedly pleasant impression. In fact, he felt extremely comfortable: these little attentions proving so pleasant and soothing in their effect, that he really wished he

had provoked them oftener. On contemplating his wife in this mood, it seemed to him that she was endowed with charms which he had up to that time failed to discern, and he was actually half inclined to fall in love with her.

Consequently, it was with considerable regret that he began the attack. Louise really seemed to him exceedingly attractive; but business is business, and seeing her in such apparent good humor, he thought this an excellent omen for the success of his enterprise, so he opened fire by saying:

"My dear, I have a slight favor to ask of you."

"I am listening," replied Louise.

"Decidedly weary of my indolent life, I am about to engage in certain business enterprises of a partly financial and partly industrial nature, which can not fail to furnish me with the means of repairing the breaches in my fortune caused by my youthful extravagance, and of materially increasing our income. Do you disapprove this intention on my part?"

"Far from it."

"I fear I should weary you by explaining my plans in detail."

"By no means; still, as it is hardly likely that I should understand—"

"You agree to this much then, do you not?"

"Certainly."

"Ah, well! I can not engage in these enterprises without capital."

"I should suppose not."

"And in order to insure us the greater part of the profits, I must soon expend quite a large sum of money."

"Do so. What hinders you?"

"Nothing, judging from the approbation you evince. But to dispose of any portion of our common property, your formal consent is necessary; that is to say, your signature, without which, the notary who has charge of your dowry is forbidden by law to yield up any portion of it."

"I am aware of that fact."

Godefroy thought: "I am progressing finely;" and already he heard the gold coins he coveted jingling in his pocket.

"So, my dear," he added, drawing out his wallet, "to carry out my plans, I shall need the signature I have just spoken of; that is all."

"And you have counted on obtaining it, Godefroy?"

"Certainly."

"I am very sorry."

"Sorry! Why?"

"Because I can not give you this signature."

"What! You refuse it?"

"Absolutely."

And as he stood there positively thunderstruck, she continued:

"Do I surprise you? If so, it is probably because your attention has been so much engrossed elsewhere

that you have not taken the trouble to read my character. You see, Godefroy, I am what is commonly called a good-natured person; but though I attach little importance to money, I do not intend to be made a laughing-stock; a very natural determination on my part, you must admit."

"I do not understand you," stammered Godefroy, thoroughly bewildered.

"I do not see how you can fail to do so. The undertaking you propose is dishonorable, worse than dishonorable, infamous. Its object is not to repair the breaches in your fortune caused by youthful extravagance, or to increase our income, but merely to better the pecuniary condition of the Countess des Orniers. Do not interrupt me," she continued, as he attempted a denial, "you will gain nothing by useless protestations. Fortunately, during your absence, certain events occurred which will enable you to better appreciate the situation. Allow me to inform you that in the presence of at least fifteen of our acquaintances, I showed your friend Josephine the door, fully explaining my reasons for so doing. She departed rather out of humor, but still retaining sufficient presence of mind to threaten me with an *au revoir* which amused us exceedingly. You can hardly suppose I have any intention of giving you the money you desire for her use after that."

Godefroy could not believe his ears; like all crafty persons he tried to discover some hidden motive in his

wife's strange conduct, seeing in her words only a test, and wondering if she was not making these misrepresentations in order to discover the truth. How could he believe that this wife formerly so passive and so resigned, had displayed so much audacity as to defy him, the man who had flattered himself that he had thoroughly intimidated her? And if she had really dismissed the countess with such publicity, was it likely that she would inform him of the fact with such perfect coolness? Still, he recollected the letter by which Josephine had peremptorily summoned him just now, and a prey to mingled despondency and anger, he no longer knew what to think.

"I must be dreaming," he said at last. "This surely can not be true. You certainly would not have dared on the strength of vague suspicions or a malicious rumor to publicly insult one of our friends."

"My dear, it is not late," replied the young wife tranquilly. "Take a carriage, and in less than half an hour Madame des Orniers will confirm all that I have just told you."

"And you have really done this thing?" exclaimed Godefroy advancing threateningly towards her.

"With very great pleasure."

With a furious movement, Godefroy seized a gilded chair, and raised it high above the head of Louise. Without flinching or attempting to avoid the blow, she reached out her arm towards the bell-rope which hung beside the chimney; and for an instant both stood

there motionless, gazing intently at each other in ominous silence. When her husband at last stepped back and dropped the chair, Louise said:

"I will make you an offer; five hundred thousand francs for my freedom; five hundred thousand francs, which shall be paid over to you the very day following that on which the law shall separate us."

"You are mad!" exclaimed Godefroy, half frantic with rage.

"In that case, I will detain you no longer," replied Louise, with the same calmness. "Madame des Orniers is probably waiting for you; good evening."

He planted himself directly in front of her.

"There must be an end to this," he said harshly.

"I warn you that at the slightest attempt at violence, I shall summon assistance."

"I know it," replied Godefroy sneeringly. "But have no fears, for I am not so foolish as to furnish you with grounds for the suit you contemplate. You need not flatter yourself that you will attain your object. Bound we are; bound we shall remain; I defy you to gain the separation which you desire; I defy you to produce any proofs of real grievances, and since you have resolved to defy me, so much the worse for you! You have chosen war; and you shall see what that is with a man like me."

Louise suddenly sprang up and pointing to the door with an imperious gesture, said:

"You are a scoundrel! Leave the room!"

"Not I," he responded with an insolent sneer. "I am in my own house, and I find you really charming this evening."

An expression of mingled terror and loathing passed over the face of Louise; then, seeing her husband again advancing towards her, she rushed to the window, threw it wide open, and exclaimed with frenzied passion: "One step more, and I will fling myself out upon the pavement!"

At first the canon's spiritual son saw in this menace a mere attempt at intimidation, a *coup de theâtre* which would amount to nothing, and never had his wife appeared so attractive; but the moment was inopportune. He had no time to waste just then: the *dénoûment* must be postponed until a better opportunity offered. Louise waited, panting violently, with a terrible interrogation in her eyes.

"I am going, said Godefroy slowly, "but remember this, Louise, there is nothing in the world, there is no person under heaven who can dissolve our marriage. So reflect; remember that your future is in your own hands; it depends entirely upon your conduct towards me."

Then, drawing a paper from his pocket, and laying it on the mantel:

"Here," he added, "is a power of attorney to which I must have your signature. I shall wait for it in my room until five o'clock in the morning; after that hour has passed, you may expect anything from me."

CHAPTER XXIV.

NO HOPE OF AID.

IN the meantime Baron Vaconsin was enjoying himself hugely at Bovilliers. Hares, partridges, grouse and game of every description must have imagined that the end of the world had come, so great was the slaughter effected by the baron and his friends, in the arrondissement. The servants at the château were kept busy from morning until night, and great hampers of game were nightly despatched to Paris, to Bonapartists there, who fancied that the happy days of the Compiègne hunts had come again.

There was a large party at the château; covers were laid for forty guests every day, and the Baroness Vaconsin de Bovilliers, *née* de Bèlencour was at her wits end, for not unfrequently the supply of silver proved inadequate, and they were often obliged to hire assistant laundresses to wash the table linen as fast as it was needed.

In the midst of all this confusion came a telegram from Louise:

"*Please send carriage to meet the four o'clock train.*"

"Something has happened!" the baroness remarked to her husband. "I have a presentiment of it."

The baron shook his head without making any response, for he was secretly thinking:

"How inconvenient just now. We were enjoying ourselves so much!"

An hour after the arrival of the train, Louise ascended the steps leading to the château. Her mother was at the door to receive her, and Louise threw herself into her arms and burst into tears as she kissed her.

"Take care, Louise, take care, my child. The servants are watching you, and we have company. They must not see you in such a condition. Come to my room. Your father remained at home from the hunt to welcome you. I will send him word that you have come."

As she led her daughter to her private apartments, she gave the necessary order.

"Now, my dear," she said, "what is the matter? You positively terrify me."

Then listening an instant:

"Wait; some one is coming,—your father, undoubtedly. Yes, here he is; now we will listen to you."

The baron saw at a glance that some disagreeable revelation was in store for him, and even while he kissed Louise, he frowned impatiently. He detested solemnity of any sort, and especially unpleasant surprises; besides, he was secretly angry with his daughter for bursting in upon them like a bomb-shell, without informing them in advance of the object of her visit.

"What the deuce was the matter!"

He was not obliged to ask. In clear and concise terms, Louise informed her parents of all that had occurred; she described the scenes of the previous day, the punishment she had inflicted on Madame des Orniers, and the interview which had followed between herself and Godefroy, and concluded by saying that a separation was inevitable, and that she counted upon the support of her family.

To her great surprise, a silence which could not have been the result of consternation alone, followed her statement of the case. Her father and mother though sincerely grieved, displayed great prudence; there was no ouburst of indignation or of tenderness. They acted very much like people of whom some one had asked a loan, and who, not daring to utter a straightforward refusal, were racking their brains to find some way of escape.

"The devil! the devil!" exclaimed the baron, moving uneasily about in his chair.

"Ah, good heavens, good heavens!" moaned the baroness, *née* de Bèlencour, hiding her face in her hands.

"What a misfortune!"

"How terrible!"

One would have thought that the brunt of the affliction had fallen upon them.

"Can it be that you intend to desert me?" asked Louise, completely bewildered.

"You are mad! Certainly not, but—"

"But what? Was not my marriage your work? Should you not yourselves deliver me from the man who has betrayed your confidence?"

"Ah! my poor child!" exclaimed the baroness, lifting her eyes to heaven, "what do you suppose that we can do for you? By what authority can we keep you in opposition to your husband's wishes? We are unable even to offer you a refuge. The law gives your husband a right to tear you from our very arms."

"Besides," added the baron, "have you reflected on the scandal of a separation? What! you do not shrink from a suit, from the pleading of the lawyers, and the comments of society?"

"No," replied Louise, "having no cause to reproach myself, these things have no terrors for me."

"Possibly not for you, but what an ordeal for us!"

"Yes, my child," added the baroness, with tears in her eyes, "for us, my daughter, who will become the laughing-stock of our acquaintances. Have you thought of the blame that will attach to us? We shall be accused of imprudence, and we shall be severely censured. Have you given the subject sufficient consideration? Moreover, do you suppose that your husband will not oppose you? He has virtually announced his intention of doing so by defying you to triumph over him. He is consequently sure of your inability to produce any conclusive proofs of ill-treatment on his part and--strange as it may appear to you

—he may be able to produce evidence against you and against your character that will materially weaken *your* charges against him."

"Besides, how would it be, even if you should gain your suit?" continued this fond father. "What would become of you? Where would you go? What social standing would you be able to preserve? I confess, my dear daughter, that your return to our household would be extremely painful to me. You would ever seem to me a reproachful spectre; and my disappointment and mortification would overwhelm me. Such an arrangement is not to be thought of, so what would you do? Enter a convent?"

"That would certainly be the best arrangement," said the baroness with a sob; "but she is not sufficiently devout and submissive in disposition, and that is, perhaps, the real cause of all the trouble."

"And what if you attempted to remain in society in the character of a divorced woman?" continued the baron, with a sigh of acquiescence. "Ah, my poor Louise, you have no idea of the mortification to which you would be subjected. However exemplary your conduct might be, you would not escape suspicion; and sooner or later you would inevitably become the victim either of treacherous insinuations or of machinations from which no one would have the power to protect you."

Louise made no attempt to interrupt them, but gazed first at one, and then at the other with a sort of

unaffected curiosity. She had been prepared for anything but this—this indifference so manifestly selfish in its character. She understood them thoroughly, and rising, without making any reply to their admonitions, she said:

"Pardon me, both of you. I was carried away by excitement, but I am calmer now. After all, the peril has not yet come; let matters remain as they are for the present."

The faces of her parents suddenly brightened. They were convinced that they had made a deep impression on the mind of their unfortunate daughter; and they believed her intimidated by the gloomy picture they had drawn of her future.

"Yes, that will be best," they replied, evidently greatly relieved. "Calm your emotions first; allow your strained nerves time to relax, and the situation will doubtless appear to you under entirely different colors. We can discuss the subject to some purpose then."

Louise carried filial respect so far as to thank them and wish them good-night.

"Will you not remain several days?" inquired the baron.

"No, father; I shall return to Paris to-morrow morning, very probably before you are up, so bid me good-by now."

When she was once more alone in her own chamber, Louise sank into a chair, crushed and bewildered

What! were these the parents she had loved and trusted? This was her family? Wounded, mortified and threatened, she had come to ask their protection, and they had nothing for her but commonplaces! They even insinuated that she was chiefly to blame, since she had brought her misfortunes upon herself by the rebellious disposition which her brother, they said, had encouraged in her.

How completely were her illusions destroyed! What a feeling of isolation suddenly assailed her! She had nothing to hope for from them. Indeed, to judge from the disposition they displayed, they were rather inclined to censure their unhappy daughter than to espouse her cause. Still, they were greatly deceived, if they fancied they had shaken her determination. More firmly than ever was Louise resolved to sever every link that bound her to her husband. Even though she set all Paris to talking about her, stirred up public opinion against her, though she might be obliged to renounce her friendships, and her rank in society, and even exile herself from her native land, she was resolved to leave this man at any cost.

When the baron and baroness were again alone together, they very naturally exchanged some disagreeable remarks, each being anxious to escape the responsibility of what had occurred.

"This is only what one might expect from your legitimist bigots!" sneered the baron.

"This is the result of a liberal education," retorted madame, bitterly.

The quarrel did not become serious, however, from the fact that both of them flattered themselves that they had induced Louise to quietly submit to her lot.

It is not unfrequently the case with women that when the age of maternity has passed, the maternal sentiments and instincts seem to die out entirely. Their offspring no longer have the power to arouse their sympathy. Their child is no more to them than any other person: they wish him or her well if everything goes on smoothly, but circumstances may, at any moment, cause them to look upon their own offspring as an enemy. The jealousy of a mother towards a daughter, which is quite often noticed, is a manifestation of this phenomenon; and the avidity with which some mothers in moderate circumstances pursue their sons in order to extort money from them, has no other explanation. No remnant of maternal indulgence and affection remains; the child no longer exists. As soon as she leaves the house, the daughter becomes a rival; the son, too often a debtor whom they do not blush to harass in every conceivable way, and whose prosperity seems to them a personal affront unless they can profit by it.

Fortunately for Louise, her mother, baffled at every point from her infancy, was now too advanced in years to seek revenge or compensation in the fashionable world, and aspired to a single blessing—peace. Ah! she might at least be left undisturbed. The time had certainly come when she should enjoy the reward of her resignation!

"Have I not deserved it?" she said to herself, with the greatest possible sincerity.

Obliged to yield to her father, she had married a man whom she hated; she had endured with more or less equanimity her inevitable contact and intimacy with this despised person; she had borne him two children, which she had reared and cared for until they became old enough to fight the battle of life for themselves. What more could any one expect of her?

She had considered herself freed from all further obligations to humanity, and here was one of her children suddenly returning to torment her. This was too much!

"Why could *she* not in turn have accepted her lot with resignation," she said sulkily to herself. "What has she to complain of, after all? Her husband does not please her? Well, does she suppose I went into ecstacies over mine? He bores her to death, he defrauds her; he threatens her with personal violence; the whole affair drives me nearly frantic; but I have had a similar experience. I can only pray for her."

Whereupon the good lady fell into a peaceful slumber, and dreamed that everything came to rights of its own accord.

As for the baron, he called in the aid of his philosophy.

"I understand," he said to himself; "it is like having a tooth drawn. One makes a great ado for a time, but one soon gets over it. The first time I meet my

son-in-law, I shall expostulate with him; and unless he tells me to mind my business, which I should not have failed to do if M. Bèlencour had seen fit to meddle with *my* affairs, this conjugal quarrel will amount to nothing."

Having arrived at this eminently satisfactory conclusion, he went to bed, and regaled himself with a perusal of a copy of the *Premier-Paris*, in which the editor made it as clear as daylight that the government was composed entirely of scoundrels who were no better than highway robbers.

After a sleepless night, Louise rose with the dawn, and dressed hastily, eager to leave this house in which there was no longer any place for her. The entire household was still asleep, and she descended to the garden without encountering any one. There, she wandered aimlessly along under the trees whose foliage was already dyed with the tints of autumn.

The melancholy aspect of nature harmonized with the sadness that oppressed her own heart. She seemed to be bidding a final adieu to this spot which had been the cradle of her earliest infancy, and in which she had dreamed so many girlish dreams,—dreams which were not unreasonable, but which had nevertheless been cruelly disappointed. Yes, cruelly, for what had she done to deserve such a fate?

As she again asked herself this question, the face of Pierre rose before her, and she bowed her head.

"What have I done?" she repeated. "I stifled the

dictates of my heart. I resisted the mysterious power that attracted me to him. I was ashamed to love a man who worshipped God in a different manner from that which I had been taught. I disdained the happiness that was offered to me; I condemned to pain and suffering a good and honest heart that loved and honored me, and that would have made my life one long, chaste, noble poem. I was a coward, an egotist and a fool. That is what I have done; that is why I have no right to complain of my unhappy fate since it is my own work.

"Yes, a coward and an egotist," she repeated, "since I repaid his love with a scorn that has cast a shadow over his life; a fool, for to whom and to what have I sacrificed his happiness and mine? To religious prejudices, which I have the humiliation to share with Madame des Orniers, and others of a similar character, and to a father and mother who are bored by the account of my misfortunes!"

She remembered what her brother had said to her in the Exhibition of painting, apropos of Pierre's picture.

"How perfectly right he was," she said sadly.

A desire to write to Charles and summon him to her aid flashed through her mind. In three days, he could be with her. He was in Vienna, acting as military attaché to the French Embassy. Once in receipt of a telegram from her, he would obtain leave, return to her, listen to her revelations and then—

Then, he would perhaps take such vigorous measures

that his career would be compromised, if not ruined. She knew him so well! He would go on regardless of consequences; impetuous and incapable of hesitation, whatever the result might be.

No; she abandoned this plan and tried to persuade herself that she would be able to fight her own battles unaided; that her strength would suffice her in the struggle she must undertake to cast off the yoke from which she was determined to free herself at any cost. It was not from fear that she resolved not to ask her brother's aid, but from affection for him.

Abbé Lahoulotte, the poor curate, whom she had not seen since her return from Cannes, surprised her there.

"You, Madame!" he exclaimed with mingled astonishment and compassion, "you, here, in the cold and fog."

"Yes, Monsieur, yes; but I did not come to join in the hunt, I assure you."

"I was satisfied of that."

"Why?"

"By the expression of your face."

"What does that say?"

"That you are in trouble."

"Worse than trouble, my father," exclaimed Louise with a sob.

The abbé stretched out his long, angular hand.

"Rise," he said gently, "walk on by my side and tell me your troubles, my child. He, who listens to you, is not only a priest, but a poor, tried and tempted

human being like yourself; you are sure of being understood.

She told him all without the slightest reserve; all, even her unhappiness in the days immediately following her marriage, her love for a Jew, her remorse on that account, her wrath against destiny, and her determination to free herself from her bondage.

The abbé did not seem shocked in the least; but when she had concluded, he paused and again taking her hand, said with kindly earnestness:

"Never, my dear child, have I so deeply regretted my insignificance as now, since it makes me incapable of rendering you any effectual aid. Ah! why did you not confide your mental conflicts to me before it was too late to prevent these misfortunes! A minister of Christ, imbued with his spirit, I might have strengthened you against yourself. I should have said to you: 'Go in peace, my daughter; follow the promptings of your own heart, without fear of offending God. Remember what we are; mere atoms in the immensity of the universe. How can you suppose that the Creator of countless worlds will take offence at the love of a poor girl merely because the man she loves prays in Hebrew, instead of in Latin?'"

Strange to say, she was not surprised at these strange teachings from the lips of an abbé. She comprehended only one thing: that she could expect no more aid from God in releasing her from her martyrdom, than He had vouchsafed in protecting her from it. Upon whom, then, could she depend?

"Upon yourself alone, Louise. Yourself alone, with the aid of time."

He said this in all sincerity; but still, was this really so? She repeated the question to herself, unwilling to admit, on his simple affirmation that there was nothing for her but resignation.

To resign herself to her fate! The very thought made her soul revolt. What! submit to such injustice? Rather would she brave any scandal. She would endure anything in preference to the humiliation of acknowledging herself conquered. What deference did she owe to the wishes of parents who had virtually cast her off, and who thought the best thing she could do would be to bury herself for life within the walls of a cloister.

"The abbé is right," she said to herself. "I have only myself to rely upon. So be it, then!"

At nine o'clock, she took the train for Paris, returned to her home, and sent a message to her notary requesting him to call upon her immediately.

"I have need of a part of my dowry," she said to him, on his entrance. "Can you give it to me?"

"With your husband's consent, I can give you all you desire."

"Is there no way to dispense with his consent?"

"None."

"But what if I should contract debts?"

"Debts of what kind, Madame?"

"What difference does it make what kind of debts they may be?"

"Pardon me, it makes a great deal of difference. If you purchase furniture or clothing or anything of that description, and if the total amount expended is in accord with your fortune and position, whatever resistance your husband may make, the courts will compel him to pay the money."

"But what if the indebtedness should be the result of unfortunate speculations?"

"Real or pretended?"

"Either."

"The courts will declare your common property free from all obligation."

"Very well. But to return to the original proposition. What if my husband should be placed in a similar position? In that case, is there any probability that he would obtain the same decision?"

"Alas, no."

"Hence, it follows that it is in his power to ruin us at any time, while I—"

"You, Madame, under such circumstances, could demand a division of the property, and there is little doubt but that your request would be complied with."

"In that case should I have a right to make such disposition of the remainder as I choose?"

"With his consent, yes."

"*With his consent?*" repeated Louise. "That is absurd."

"I do not deny it," replied the notary; "but such is the law, and one cannot go against the law. Alas,

Madame, I know what is troubling you very well; but I see no chance whatever to protect you from the dangers that certainly threaten your property. In the eyes of the law, you remain a minor; in short, you are in your husband's power."

The young wife remained silent for a moment, then rising, she said:

"I thank you. Excuse me for having troubled you unnecessarily."

"Do not trouble yourself in the least about that; I should have come under any circumstances. Here is a power of attorney which M. d'Aitignies brought to me, with the request that I would ask your signature. By this means, he proposes to draw six hundred thousand francs from the joint fund. What do you decide?"

"If I sign it, will you give *me* the money," asked Louise.

"No; I cannot pay it to any one without an order from him."

"Then you can probably divine my response."

"Without being remarkably discerning."

"Well, I see that the law, too, is against me. Really, sir, it is horrible. Truly, a woman's lot is hard in this world; she seems doomed to a humiliating and constant state of dependence. She has no rights whatever. Her parents dispose of her to suit their liking; hand her over to the first-comer, not unfrequently, and if they should make a mistake or be deceived, she alone must bear the penalty. I repent of

my severity towards such as have gone astray. I understand their feelings now, and can excuse them."

"What do you mean, madame?"

"I mean that they are right to refuse to be slaves to the laws of propriety which every man around them breaks when it suits his caprice. Yes, they are right, for they can at least avenge themselves!"

These words uttered in the frenzy of impotent rage, led Louise, when she was once more alone, into a prolonged meditation. A ray of light seemed to have suddenly burst upon her vision. Vengeance! perhaps in that, lay her only chance of salvation.

If it was impossible for *her* to obtain a separation from her husband, might she not perhaps compel him to sue for a divorce from her?

In that case, he would undoubtedly gain his suit; he would apparently triumph over her, and it would be upon her, that public censure would fall.

But what of that, if she attained her object, if she recovered her liberty, if the bond was broken, and there was nothing more in common between her and that infamous wretch?

Her family would disown her? Let them. She knew now what aid and consolation she had to expect from her parents. Society would close its doors against her? She cared little for that. Were her relatives and society of such value to her that she should condemn herself to remain in constant contact with that vile wretch? No, a thousand times no!

Still, to compel her husband to demand a separation from her, she must be guilty of some glaring breach of propriety in morals or conduct. Would she have the necessary courage to overcome her repugnance to anything of this kind? Godefroy was not sensitive as she was well aware. Would it be necessary to go to the last extreme in order to effect her purpose.

But on reflection, she became reassured. With a few rare exceptions, husbands who seem to have no shame themselves, are singularly exacting in regard to their wives' conduct. This is due probably to their vanity, and to their remarkable sensitiveness on points of honor. In refined society, the man whose wife is talked about is not likely to hear any comments on the subject. In other circles, it is different: intoxication renders such attacks frequent and brutal; the first disreputable woman the husband offends, has a sneer ready; and if it is a witty one, the auditors never fail to applaud, and it is not long before the most philosophical husband is obliged to make a public protest. Louise knew this; and as Godefroy in addition to his other pleasing qualities possessed the vanity of a peacock, she decided it would be a comparatively easy matter to bring about the result she desired.

CHAPTER XXV.

A HAZARDOUS SCHEME.

LOUISE was to attend the Opera the following Monday; and if the Lambertyns came to Paris, they were to occupy seats in her box.

Counting upon their presence, and aware that they were the most inveterate of gossips, the young wife, still smarting under wrongs for which she could discover no redress, resolved to take advantage of this opportunity to strike a decisive blow which, thanks to them, would become the talk of all Paris, the next day.

With this object in view, she wrote a hasty note to Octave Valastruc, requesting him to call at her house before the dinner-hour.

About five o'clock, he presented himself.

"What are you going to do this evening?" she inquired.

"Whatever you like."

"Very well. Have you your seat at the opera, still?"

"Yes. I renewed my subscription only yesterday."

"Very well; come and escort me from my box during the last act."

"*Escort you from your box?*"

"Are you afraid?"

"You are jesting, probably."

"I was never more thoroughly in earnest. My curiosity demands satisfaction."

"In what respect?"

"I am always hearing of the *Café Anglais*, and I am anxious to go there."

"Impossible."

"It is nevertheless possible that I beg you will take me there to supper after the opera."

The young man seemed far more surprised than delighted. In spite of his foibles, he was the possessor of plenty of good, sound sense, and he did not delude himself in regard to the feeling which prompted Louise to this escapade. He had not lost his sense of discernment, and in spite of his abundant stock of self-esteem, he did not imagine for an instant that the lady was in love with him. Naturally, his vanity was wounded; but we must do him the justice to say that a feeling of profound commiseration made him almost forget that fact. If Louise had said to him in an outburst of indignation and friendly confidence; "I wish to make people believe that you are my lover," he would not have hesitated for a moment. He pitied her deeply, and would have served her with pleasure, consoling himself for the apparent injury he did her, by the thought that he was furnishing her with the means of freeing herself from that vile scoundrel d'Aitignies; but if, instead of initiating him into the plot, she tried to make use of him by dazzling him with false hopes—then that was an entirely different matter!

"My dear madame," he began, with a tinge of sarcasm in his manner, "pray enlighten me in regard to the game you are playing. I like to see my way clearly; and I am not so foolish as to take it into my head that you have become a victim to my charms."

"You are modest, then?"

"No; I am distrustful."

"With me?"

"More distrustful with you than with any one else; and I do not suspect, but am certain that you contemplate a scandal—"

"And what if I do?" retorted the young wife, nervously interrupting him.

"Confess as much and—we will see."

"Very well: I will admit whatever you like."

"That is too much, or not enough."

"Are you afraid of a duel, my dear sir?"

"It is unnecessary for me to answer that question. I have passed through several such ordeals unscathed. Do you desire to become a widow?"

Louise shrugged her shoulders.

"Thanks," she replied disdainfully. "Black is not becoming to me."

Octave rose to go.

"I thought you more honest and more courageous;" he said, with something like regret.

"Ah well!" exclaimed Louise, burning her ships behind her, "yes, it is true. I wish to ruin my reputation so that my husband will ask for a separation and obtain it."

"This is exactly what I supposed," rejoined the young man.

"Do you blame me?"

"Not at all; but your husband will not be deceived, and you will risk your reputation for nothing."

"Are you going to read me a sermon?"

"I have finished. Still, listen one moment. Deeply as you wounded me just now by your attempt to make me unwittingly play a peculiar and unprofitable rôle, I am ready now to aid you in your scheme. I once told you that I loved you; forget it. I shall never repeat the words, and you will incur no danger with me, whatever may be the situation in which it may please you to place us. You are one of those women whose friendship is even a greater treasure than their love. I do not believe you will triumph in the struggle you are undertaking; but this troubles me only on your account. I tell you with perfect sincerity, to rely upon my respect and my implicit obedience. I am at your service."

"I thank you," replied Louise, offering him her hand. "Come to my box for me this evening."

"Certainly. Shall we take supper at the *Café Anglais?*"

"Yes; and if the *tête-à-tête* does not prove unpleasant, and if there is nothing of importance to detain you in Paris, we will take the train for Marseilles to-morrow evening."

"Together?"

"Openly. I wish to see the shores of the Mediterranean. Do you consent?"

"I should say so," he replied in the *argot* of the *coulisses*.

"Then I shall expect to see you at eleven in my box at the opera. The Lambertyns will be with me. You will enter my coupé in their presence."

During the second act of Faust, Louise entered her box. It was vacant. The Lambertyns must have remained in Enghien. This mischance annoyed her. She had counted upon their presence to divert her until the arrival of Valastruc, so she would have no more time for reflection. In spite of the firmness of her resolution, she felt the necessity of keeping herself in that state of excitement which had stimulated her courage up to this time. How much she wished that the first step in the path she had determined to pursue had been taken, so that it would no longer be possible for her to pause, or to even think of turning back! What would she not have given to find herself already at the *Café Anglais!*

In default of the Lambertyns, other persons of her acquaintance would be sure to see Octave leave the opera-house with her, and perhaps some one would meet her entering the restaurant on the young man's arm.

Would that this were already done! that the news of her flight had already begun to be whispered among her friends! In that case the timidity and regret that

assailed her now, would vanish; but the absence of her Enghien friends condemned her to solitude and hesitation.

To divert her thoughts, she took a survey of the audience, seeking examples calculated to strengthen her in her resolution. How often ladies who openly braved public opinion by retaining near them men who were currently reported to be their lovers, had been pointed out to her! She looked at two or three of the most deeply compromised, and their apparent composure reassured her a little. This, however, lasted only for a moment. In spite of her strength of will, she shuddered violently, and a wild desire to leave the box, to flee, to lock herself up in her own room seized her; but gradually, she conquered this impulse, and she had partially regained composure when she heard the door of the box open. The Lambertyns, perhaps? No; a gentleman whom the comparative darkness of the little salon prevented her from seeing distinctly. It was not her husband, for the new-comer was a much better proportioned man. It could not be Octave, for it was not yet ten o'clock; it was probably some acquaintance bringing her an ice.

Suddenly, all her blood rushed to her heart; she trembled in every limb, and it was with the utmost difficulty that she succeeded in keeping herself from swooning. The person who had just entered was Pierre.

"You, you!" she exclaimed, making an almost

superhuman effort to conceal her emotion. "I thought you had left France."

"I have decided not to do so."

"Why?"

"I have come to tell you. I, at first thought of writing to you, then I remembered you would probably be in your box this evening, so I came here to meet you."

He did not appear to be conscious of his companion's agitation.

"To tell the truth," he added, "I had little expectation of being able to explain here, as I thought it more than probable you would be surrounded; but my coming would afford me an opportunity to inform you of the change in my plans, and to ask your permission to call at your house. There would be nothing to excite remark in such a visit."

As she listened, Louise became calmer, and an inexplicable feeling of relief stole over her. When she first saw him lift the *portière* he had much the effect of a spectre upon her; she felt overcome with shame before him; but now, he seemed to her a saviour, and she was seized with an irresistible longing to cling to his protecting arm, and to take refuge in his honor.

"My friend," she said, "you can not imagine the good your presence does me; you can not imagine how frightful is the precipice on whose verge you find me. Tell me the truth, Pierre. I suspect that if you have abandoned your journey it was on my account—"

"Yes; what you told me the other day appalled me; and thinking of you alone, without a guide or adviser, and surrounded by dangers that may well fill you with consternation, I asked myself if it was not my duty to lend you my assistance in this ordeal, and to aid you in bearing your burden until time shall bring you peace. Do you believe this, Louise?"

Overcome with emotion, she could only hold out her hand to him.

"Understand me fully," he added; "It is not that I have any desire to intrude myself—"

"Who could suppose such a thing?" she interrupted vehemently.

"I merely have a proposal to make to you."

She closed her eyes, and was silent for fear of saying too much.

"People like ourselves should not be afraid to speak plainly," he resumed, "since we understand each other. There is one fact which must be frankly admitted, my friend. We love each other, do we not?"

"Yes," replied Louise gravely, "yes, I love you, Pierre, and that is the whole cause of my present misery, which I richly deserve for having been so weak as to be unable to rise above unjust prejudices."

"That is a thing of the past," he rejoined, "and it is useless to refer to it. In addition to these prejudices, there were also between us barriers which many good people regard as insurmountable. Let us concede this without useless protestations, if only out of mutual

respect. Still, there is another no less certain fact. I do not care enough for myself to be contented with the realization of my ambition. You can see this plainly, since the hope of serving you has led me to abandon projects in which you held no place. When the hour of departure came, my heart failed me. 'What will become of her?' I said to myself. 'She is undergoing a dangerous and painful ordeal; injustice is maddening her. I must go to her aid. Perhaps the certainty of a disinterested devotion will prevent her from engaging in struggles in which her defeat is more than probable.' And so I have come to say to you: 'My life and yours are alike ruined, Louise; but let us strengthen and encourage each other to endure the trials of our lot nobly and courageously.' I shall be more than satisfied if my influence can save you from any irreparable step, and if it can preserve you from the consequences of desperate resolutions. This is my only hope now. Louise, I wish you to be strong and noble, superior to adversity; I wish you to be so pure and sublime that you will soar high above the trials that encompass you. By the appeal you made to heaven in my presence, I surmised all the disappointments that were awaiting you; I fancied your family and society listening with weariness or indifference to the story of your wrongs; and I saw you crushed at first, then indignant, and ready to brave public opinion with the pride of innocence, and with the natural indignation of human nature. My

fears were aroused, and I have hastened to you. With any other person, I should perhaps have hesitated, from a fear of being suspected of some ulterior motive; with you, Louise, I felt that I was secure from any such suspicion. Intense as my love for you is, you know, do you not, that I would never permit myself to take advantage of your unhappiness to induce you to lower yourself in your own estimation, as well as in mine. No; he who might have been your husband has no desire to become your lover. I offer myself to you, Louise, without any heroism, and without any pretensions, merely from the irresistible need of consecrating to you all that is worthiest in me; from a wish to ameliorate your wretchedness, and to show you that in spite of the demoralization and degradation of public morals, there are still souls sufficiently honorable or sufficiently proud, to devote themselves to the consolation of a deeply tried and injured woman without stooping to covet her."

Louise listened, eagerly drinking in his words, and gazing at him with eyes that were rendered unusually large and brilliant by the joy that shone in them.

"All I have to say in reply can be summed up in these few words," she said slowly. "You have saved me, Pierre."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I dare not tell you just at this moment, I am so bitterly ashamed of my cowardice; but since you love me, and I honor you, I defy adversity to ever

prevent me from being unworthy of the sacrifice you are making."

Pierre rose to go, and she made no attempt to detain him. Eleven o'clock was fast approaching, and she did not wish him to meet Octave.

"Come and see me to-morrow," she said. "I have a long confession to make to you."

When he had left her, she withdrew to the tiny salon connected with her *loge*, to await Valastruc there.

"Good-evening," she said, when he made his appearance. "Did you come for me?"

"No," replied Octave, with an unwonted reserve of manner that puzzled her.

"So much the better," she replied gently, "for I have changed my plans. But you—"

"Then you have heard nothing?"

"In relation to what subject?"

"Never mind. Go home and sleep peacefully; you will understand all by and by."

"Fortunately, I am not inquisitive," she answered, laughing.

Octave accompanied her through the deserted corridors to the rotunda, where the footman was awaiting her coming. As her escort bade her good-night, she said:

"You are better than I supposed."

"If you think you are flattering me, my dear madame," he replied, laughing in turn, "you are greatly mistaken." Then, with something very like melancholy, he added:

"Yes, it is true; I *am* better than I appear; but I have no right to complain of the estimate people in general place upon my merits. The cause of it is a vanity to which I have sacrificed everything in my foolish attempt to gain an entrance into a society which seemed to me the very cream of the aristocracy when seen from a distance. I have since discovered my mistake; but it is too late to retrace my steps now and return to my own sphere in life. Like the jackdaw arrayed in peacock's feathers, I now belong to neither. Mine is a wasted life, a failure."

Perceiving the footman, who had summoned the carriage and was now approaching, he shook off his evident despondency, and with a sudden change of tone, remarked:

"Your carriage is at the door. Farewell, and forgive me for having wearied you with my lamentations."

"You have not wearied me," she replied, offering him her hand, "and as I owe you an explanation, come for it whenever you like. Who knows? I shall perhaps make some revelations that will astonish you."

"A little more," thought the young man, "and we should have found ourselves face to face with her husband. That would have been the climax."

Whereupon, turning up the collar of his overcoat, he hastened towards that same *Café Anglais* where he had expected to enjoy a much pleasanter *tête-a-tête* than the conference to which he had been imperatively summoned.

CHAPTER XXVI.

GRELLA'S REVENGE.

FEW in number as were the witnesses of the punishment inflicted by the Countess d'Aitignies on Madame des Orniers, the news of it spread with characteristic rapidity; and by five o'clock it had reached the Stock Exchange, and was the prevailing topic of conversation at the clubs. As a natural consequence, it speedily reached the ears of Etienne Grella, the one person of all others who should have been kept in ignorance of the affair, if peace was to be preserved.

He listened, however, without so much as a frown; but to the great surprise of the narrator, he suddenly rushed off without evincing the slightest amusement, leaving his acquaintance standing there motionless with astonishment.

He had for a long time suspected Josephine of unfaithfulness; but was ever anything so atrocious as this! After rescuing this woman from abject poverty, and after benevolently aiding that scoundrel Godefroy in the rascally stratagem which had gained him a fortune, the two had ridiculed his credulity. Ah, that was too much! He could not swallow such a pill as that.

He recollected now sundry details which made his blood boil with rage. He remembered the cane which he had taken by mistake from Madame des Orniers' ante-chamber, on the night of Godefroy's farewell dinner to his bachelor friends; he remembered, too, the remarks, emphasized by meaning smiles, which had been made by Godefroy and Josephine, and whose significance he had not understood until now. He had shown them this cane, artlessly inquiring if they could tell him its owner, in order that he might return it.

"You should carry it constantly," was Josephine's response. "You can not fail to meet him."

"That would be a pity," replied Godefroy. "It has such an admirable effect in your hands."

Ah, that cane! it burned his fingers now; the thought of it pursued him like a nightmare.

"Why do I hesitate?" he exclaimed. "Shall I allow them to make merry at my expense any longer? To-morrow, I shall be the laughing-stock of the boulevard."

A fortunate idea suddenly occurred to him.

"So that cane belongs to *him!*" he said to himself. "Very well. I will return it."

Having arrived at this decision, he breathed a sigh of relief, and suddenly found himself so calm and tranquil that he even recollected he had not dined; so he went home, dressed himself, took the cane and wended his way to Bignon's, where he did ample justice to the viands.

About ten o'clock he entered the club-house Godefroy was in the habit of frequenting. The latter had not yet come in, but a gentleman with whom he had made an appointment was there, waiting for him.

Grella seated himself at a table where a game of *écarté* was about to begin.

"What a handsome cane," remarked the dealer of the cards.

"Do you think so? It seems to always bring me bad luck, and as it belongs to d'Aitignies, I am seeking an opportunity to return it to him."

"There he is now, just coming in," replied the other.

Godefroy had, in fact, just made his appearance. On seeing Grella, he gave him a familiar nod, and at once approaching the man who was waiting for him, he took him to a quiet corner where they could converse undisturbed. In the hope of finally effecting the arrangement in which he had thus far failed, on account of his wife's refusal to give him her signature, he had been busily engaged in consultations with different parties in order to discover some means of acquiring possession of his wife's fortune; and the person with whom he was now in conference was one of those men of doubtful reputation who make it a business to devise means of evading the law by all sorts of safe expedients.

It is reasonable to suppose that the person referred to found the task with which Count d'Aitignies desired to intrust him quite to his taste, for after a

half hour's conversation, the two gentlemen parted with a cordial handshake, and a:

"Then it is agreed?"

"It shall be attended to to-morrow."

Godefroy escorted his legal adviser to the antechamber, then returned to the card-room, considerably elated. As he entered it, the dealer, who had already won four points, turned the king.

"You are certainly right, my dear fellow," he remarked to Grella. "D'Aitignies' cane does bring you bad luck."

"My cane? What cane?" inquired Godefroy, who had approached the table.

"Ah, yes, your cane," replied Etienne, rising; "I no longer have any doubt that it is yours. It is useless to prolong the farce."

Godefroy, taken unawares, turned very pale, foreseeing an unpleasant explanation; Grella noticed it.

"You are as white as a sheet," he said sneeringly. "I do not think it likely that you will continue to laugh at my credulity."

"You must have been drinking, Grella," retorted Godefroy, summoning all his audacity. "You had better return home, and go to bed; and by and by, we can settle this little misunderstanding peaceably."

"You are confounding dates, Godefroy. The evening I was last intoxicated was the time I, by mistake, took this cane from the house of the woman who has been supporting you on my money."

"You are a liar!" yelled Godefroy.

He had not completed the sentence when Grella struck him across the face with the famous cane which he still held in his hand.

Their acquaintances interfered and separated them.

Such were the facts to which Valastruc had mentally alluded, after placing Louise in her carriage at the door of the opera house. While waiting in his seat for the moment to go to her box, a member of the club had come to tell him that Godefroy wished him to act as his second, and consequently requested him to be at the *Café Anglais* at midnight, in order to decide with Grella's friends on the details of the encounter.

When Octave reached the rendezvous, the conference had already begun. Apparently, nothing could be simpler than this affair, since there was no possibility whatever of a reconciliation; nor did there seem to be any chance for discussion. Godefroy being the insulted party, enjoyed the privilege of choosing the weapons, as well as the time and place of meeting.

"Very well," said Valastruc, "to-morrow, then, at six o'clock in the morning, at Vésinet. As to weapons, pistols at thirty-five paces."

"No," said Grella's principal second, resolutely. "We agree to the pistol, but the distance must be twenty-five paces only, and there must be as many shots as are necessary to disable one of the combatants."

"Take care," replied Octave. "You are assuming a grave responsibility."

"I am authorized to make this demand by my friend who does not desire to have the duel a farce."

Godefroy's other second took offence at this remark, and was about to make a cutting retort, when Octave checked him by quietly saying:

"Nor has M. d'Aitignies any such desire; but it seems to me that it behooves us to do all in our power to render the consequences of the affair as unmomentous as possible. So far as I am concerned, I willingly accept the consequences of a vindication of honor which I consider inevitable under the circumstances; but if the conditions of the duel lead to the death of either of the parties, I shall place the responsibility where it belongs."

"What do you mean?"

"I intend, in such a case, to publicly announce the fact that it was M. Grella's friends who expressly imposed this condition."

He fancied this would frighten them, but he was mistaken.

"Here are our principal's instructions," said Grella's second, handing Octave a paper. "You will find the demand clearly expressed there, and by inserting this in your report, you will be freed from any possible blame."

"This promises to be a most disagreeable affair," thought Octave.

"Are you aware that we incur danger of imprisonment?" he still persisted.

"Does that alarm you, gentlemen?"

"The fact, at least, furnishes food for reflection."

"In that case, decide promptly. M. Grella is not at all inclined to end the affair with a dozen oysters."

Octave did not know what to retort, though he felt an intense desire to vent his ire on his antagonist.

The discussion was a protracted one; but it was finally decided that after three shots fired on each side, the seconds should declare honor satisfied, and should retire, taking the weapons with them, whether the combatants wished to continue the strife or not.

Thoroughly reassured, Octave offered no further opposition, and at two o'clock the seconds separated, entirely agreed on all points, and Octave proceeded to the private room where Godefroy was to await the result of the conference.

On reaching it, the waiter handed him a note. He opened it and read:

"12.40 A. M.

"MY DEAR OCTAVE:—Josephine has sent for me. Anxiety has made her ill. It is useless for me to remain here, and as soon as the conditions of the meeting are decided upon, be so kind as to inform me of them at the house of our friend whom I am going to reassure, if possible. Truly Yours,

"GODEFROY."

The young man tore up the note, and springing into his coupé ordered the coachman to drive to the residence of Madame des Orniers.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"FOR WHATSOEVER A MAN SOWETH THAT SHALL HE ALSO REAP."

ABOUT one o'clock the next afternoon, Louise, who had breakfasted alone, was making preparations to go out when her maid opened the door and announced:

"Madame's brother."

"Charles!" exclaimed Louise on perceiving him, "come in. How welcome you are!"

She sprang into his arms and kissed him with unwonted fervor.

He had just arrived from the railroad station, dusty and travel-stained, followed by a soldier bearing his portmanteau, and had come to claim her hospitality, as his father and mother were still at Bovilliers. He was also hungry, with the genuine hunger of an active young man.

Louise gave her orders, and relinquished her room to him until another could be prepared.

"Make yourself at home," said she. "I breakfasted on nothing, all alone; now you have come, I will begin again."

While Captain Vaconsin—he had recently been promoted—was making his toilet, assisted by his orderly,

she went to the kitchen in person, to accelerate the movements of her servants.

"Is your master at home?" she inquired.

"No, madame."

"Has he gone out already?"

Her maid's silent embarrassment made her smile; but without taking the servants into her confidence, she insisted:

"Did not your master return last night?"

"No, madame."

"Make no allusion to the fact in my brother's presence," the countess said, by way of conclusion.

The improvised repast was a most enjoyable one. Both ate heartily; and delighted to find themselves again together, they talked freely, regardless of the servants who waited upon them.

"Were you going out, Louise?" asked the captain, as he lighted his cigar after breakfast was over.

"I was only going for a walk, so you need have no scruples about detaining me. I shall give up my excursion, and as you spent last night in the cars, I am going to abandon my room to you, so you can rest awhile."

"By no means. My bath and your claret have entirely restored me; so let us take a walk together. It is so delightful to be in Paris again!"

Louise needed no urging, and putting on, without even a glance at the mirror, the bonnet and mantle which her maid brought her, she took her brother's arm to descend the staircase.

Just as they stepped into the street, a carriage paused before the door, and Octave Valastruc sprang hastily out. He had the sallow complexion of a man who has not slept; his linen was soiled and rumpled, his boots were splashed with mud, and when he lifted his hat, Louise saw that his hair was dishevelled, and on one of his cuffs she noticed some tiny spots of blood.

"Madame," he began with nervous volubility, "will you step inside, a moment, if you please. I have an important communication to make to you."

"On what subject?" inquired Louise, struck by the agitation visible in his face.

"I can not tell you here, madame."

"Let us go back," said Charles, who apprehended some grave disclosure.

Without another word, the three hastily crossed the court-yard, and entering the first apartment they came to, paused, all equally agitated.

"Shall I withdraw?" inquired Charles.

"Not at all! On the contrary," replied Octave, "if madame will permit, it is to you, captain, that I will first explain what brings me here. But I am tired out," he added, breathlessly. "Permit me to take off my overcoat and rest a moment."

He removed the garment without waiting for permission, and Louise perceived that he was still wearing the same costume in which he had appeared in her box at the opera, the evening before, and that his shirt-front, cravat and coat were terribly rumpled.

"If what you have to say relates to my husband," said Louise quietly, "you can speak, sir. What has happened to him?"

"He had a quarrel last evening at the club, and this morning—"

"He fought?"

"He fought, and contrary to all expectation, he was wounded."

"Severely?"

"The ball entered the upper part of the arm, near the shoulder."

"Did you bring him back with you?"

"No; the physician thought the journey might prove dangerous. I have hired for a month a small country house that was vacant, near the place of meeting. Godefroy is there, and while one of my friends went to summon your family physician, I hastened to you?"

"Well?"

"Do you intend going there?"

"Certainly: it is unquestionably my duty to nurse my husband. Let us start at once."

The captain, noticing an evident embarrassment and hesitation in the manner of the young man, supposed that Godefroy's condition was more precarious than he dared to say.

"You can not travel in that costume," he said to his sister.

"That is true," replied Louise; "but wait for me; it will take me only a moment to change my dress."

"Captain," said Octave, quickly, as soon as the young wife had disappeared, "try to dissuade Madame d'Aitignies from going."

"Why? Is her husband dead?"

"No; but he has summoned some one who will probably arrive before she does."

"Madame des Orniers?"

"Precisely."

"You are right. We must, at least, warn Louise."

"Will you do so?"

"Certainly."

"In that case, captain, I will return home. I can not remain any longer in this costume."

The young men shook hands; then Octave left the house, and Charles went up to his sister's room.

"Louise," he said, "I want you to tell me your exact intentions."

"I have already told you; to do my duty. Whatever may have been the cause of the accident that has befallen him, Count d'Aitignies is my husband. Were it only for humanity's sake, I should give him all necessary care. Why do you appear so embarrassed?"

"It is best to confess the truth," replied the captain. "It is more than probable that Madame des Orniers is already there, and that you will find her by his bedside."

Louise manifested no emotion whatever.

"But what will you do in that case?" insisted her brother.

"Unless M. d'Aitignies sends me away, which is scarcely probable, I shall take the place she has usurped. It is my rightful place, and if she does not retire of her own accord, I shall request you to convince her of the necessity of doing so."

This proved unnecessary, however, for Josephine, warned by Valastruc, had departed when Louise reached the cottage to which her husband had been carried. On crossing the threshold of the chamber in which he was lying, she found four persons: the physician of the place, assisted by their family physician who had brought an eminent surgeon with him, and the anxious face of Rémondat.

On the entrance of the young wife and her brother, the three doctors retired for consultation; but in about a quarter of an hour they returned, and prescribed a course of treatment which it was anything but easy to follow in an abode so destitute of all the necessary conveniences of life.

Louise, leaving the bedside of the wounded man, listened to them attentively.

"What is the situation?" she asked.

"We can not determine at once," replied the surgeon. "To-morrow I hope we shall be able to reply more definitely."

"What is the worst danger that threatens him?"

"The worst, madame, will be the amputation of the wounded member."

Louise said no more; her mind was made up. Very

calmly she gave the necessary orders for a protracted sojourn, and that same evening her servants brought linen, silver, cooking utensils—all that was needed. A camp-bed was placed in the sick man's room, and Louise announced her intention of nursing him, an unpleasant task even when the watcher's devotion is stimulated by love or friendship; and in this case, there were terrible paroxysms of pain which she soothed and alleviated without faltering a moment.

The surgical operation was successfully performed, and then, nothing remained but to await the result. The young wife spared no effort, and remained constantly by his bedside, sleeping only at rare intervals and then, without removing her clothing, attentive to his slightest want, displaying an unfailing patience and cheerfulness, and finding kind and encouraging words to revive the drooping spirits of the patient.

"A truly admirable woman!" said Abbé Rémondat.

He had rented a room near by, but did not succeed in persuading Louise to allow him to take her place as nurse even for a single night.

The Baron and Baroness Vaconsin de Bovilliers, who had hastily returned to Paris on hearing of the event, came every day, and went into ecstacies over their daughter's conduct; while in Parisian drawing-rooms, Madame d'Aitignies was cited as a model.

One night, after a feverish sleep that had lasted nearly two hours, Godefroy gradually awoke. He glanced indifferently around the room, dimly lighted

by the night-lamp and by the flames of a little wood fire that was burning on the hearth. At first, he had but a vague idea of the place in which he found himself and of the circumstances which had brought him there. Diverted by the dance of the shadows on the curtains and walls of the room, he experienced a vague sensation of comfort for which he had not even the curiosity to mentally account. Soon, however, a consciousness of the reality returned on perceiving Louise, who was dozing in an arm-chair near the fire. Then, he remembered his duel, the wound he had received, and the constant attention she had lavished upon him. A sort of compassion for her seized him. In spite of the depravity of his nature, he could not stifle a feeling of remorse, and likewise of astonishment. Here was a poor girl who knew only too well, alas! that she had been married for the sake of her money, that she had been deceived and legally swindled, that she had not been appreciated or even respected by her husband, and that he had fought, too, for the sake of a disreputable woman, but who nevertheless was here, wearing herself out in nursing him, overcoming without apparent effort, not only her natural indignation, but the feeling of repulsion that must be awakened by her anything but agreeable task, and evincing not only a remarkable sweetness and cheerfulness of disposition, but an indefatigable zeal in his service. And why?

He pondered over this question a long time without

being able to find a satisfactory explanation, not daring, adventurous as he was, to attribute his wife's conduct to love. No; he admitted that was improbable, for he had spared her no mortification, and yet — women are such strange creatures! who could say that the very disdain with which he had treated her had not produced this effect without her knowledge?

Touched by this supposition, he contemplated Louise in silence, discovering in her charms heretofore unknown. Take her all in all, she was certainly superior to any lady of his acquaintance. Her careless attitude, in the light sleep into which she had fallen, displayed to great advantage the charms of her youthful loveliness. What an elegance there was in the contour of her form! what a freshness and purity of tint in the soft white skin!

He pictured himself even after his recovery, crippled, deprived of one arm, and dependent upon others for constant and necessary attentions. Who would be a slave to him, then, who would consent to assume this state of virtual servitude except a woman endowed with such virtue as to successfully undergo an ordeal like that through which Louise had just passed? Ah, virtue! an unknown and despised word heretofore; but now full of promises of self-sacrifice and touching submission.

And how pretty she looked, quietly sleeping there in the cosy, dimly lighted chamber, her bosom rising and falling slightly with each regular respiration!

What a charm there was in the delicate and refined loveliness that characterized her whole person? A strange joy filled his heart at the thought that this woman was his—his wife, bound to him by ties which no human power could sever.

He felt tempted to awaken her, to confess his faults, ask her forgiveness, and pledge her henceforth a repentant fidelity.

How could he ever have been so blind as to think her commonplace, and tame? Louise, commonplace? Ah, no! He recollected the scene that had occurred on the evening of his return from Havre, after which, in spite of her indignant protests and warnings, he had foolishly embarked in the undertaking which had brought him to a bed of suffering. How regally she had borne herself then!

Fool! that was the time he should have fallen at her feet and exclaimed: "I repent. Put me to the test. I will do whatever you desire!"

Any one else would have asked if it was not too late now for her to forgive him, for her to consent to once more regard him as a husband. Not so with him; the superiority which he had been so slow to recognize, satisfied him on that point. By reason of her principles, her education, and the religious sentiments, of which he knew her to be the possessor, Louise could not fail to stand the test. Did she not give proofs of that by devoting herself to him as she was doing at that very moment?

This tardily recognized superiority of character on the part of his wife, made him sanguine of a final reconciliation; so counting upon that, he promised himself to change his habits. Without perceiving the rather comical side of his supremely egotistical conversion, he marked out a very pleasant future. He would spend more time at home; they could not fail to be very happy — a model couple, in short; and thus dreaming, he fell asleep.

The next morning the physician found the patient's head hot, his gaze wandering and his breathing irregular. He returned again at noon, something he had not done for several days. That evening, he could not conceal his anxiety, and calling the canon into the adjoining room, he said:

"I apprehend complications."

"Of a serious character?" inquired the abbé, with a terrible sinking of heart.

"Very serious. The wound looks badly, and I fear the inflammation has extended to depths which it is impossible to reach, and that the consequence will be a fever which may terminate fatally."

Rémondat could not restrain his tears.

"Sir," said the doctor in surprise, "you are a man and a priest, a two-fold reason why you should be firm and courageous. It is my duty to warn you; it is *yours* to protect from any sudden shock this young wife who shows such great devotion to her husband."

Godefroy slept until midnight; then he uttered a slight cry, followed by a peal of nervous laughter. Louise approached the bedside. Her husband opened his eyes, but he did not recognize her, but addressing her as Josephine, poured forth a volley of the coarsest abuse and invectives. Delirium had seized him.

Louise sent for the doctor, who came immediately, accompanied by Rémondat. The last resource consisted in an operation which only a surgeon could perform, so they were forced to wait until the morrow.

On listening to the ravings of the sick man, the abbé lost the last vestige of composure. Sobs choked his utterance; he was no longer a man and a priest, he was only a father who wrung his hands, praying earnestly one moment and uttering imprecations against fate the next; and they were finally obliged to expel him forcibly from the sick room.

Louise was astonished. What! could it be that this priest, whom she, in common with the other members of her church, had regarded as a saint, imbued with the power of the Holy Spirit, was capable of such a display of weakness?

Where was the man of faith, the apostle? Where was the creature so far above the sorrows of this vale of tears, so superior to the trials of this brief sojourn here below? Why these despairing sobs, this frantic and apparently hopeless grief?

"Calm yourself," expostulated the doctor, "and think of the sick man's salvation."

"His salvation?" faltered the dignitary of the church, in abject consternation. "Then is there no longer any hope?"

"One can never tell. Still, if you wish him to receive the last sacrament of the church—"

Rémondat's grief-distorted features assumed an expression of indignant anger.

"What!" he exclaimed passionately, forgetful of his priestly office, "you would force him to receive the sacrament? You would have the cruelty to watch for a lucid moment in which to say to the unhappy young man, in the name of a far-off and incomprehensible divinity: 'There is no longer any hope. All is over for you; you must die.' Anxiety for his soul, do you say? Who knows that it survives the decomposition of the organic elements which form the tenement of clay that contains it? Why torment him, while he may still cherish illusions in regard to the duration of his life? There is a God, or there is not. If there is, of what importance are formalities of human invention in his infinite mercy? And if there is not—"

He did not finish his sentence, having already become weary of this fruitless discussion. What was the use of wasting time in theological speculation, when a surgeon's knife was of more avail than all the sacraments imaginable? And without paying any heed to the mute astonishment of Louise, he rang and ordered horses to be harnessed at once, as he himself proposed to go for the surgeon.

In the carriage that bore him swiftly towards Paris, he indulged now, in despairing lamentations, now, in fits of frantic anger. Were the physicians, too, impostors and charlatans? Which of them possessed sufficient skill to save the unfortunate man? He thought of assembling the entire Faculty, and of offering his whole fortune to the one who would, by a bold operation, restore the being he loved to health.

At daybreak Rémondat returned to the cottage at Vésinet, accompanied by the same surgeon who had amputated Godefroy's arm. As he sprang hastily from the vehicle, he saw Louise hurrying forward to meet him.

"Do not go in," she said, in a tone of profound commiseration.

"My God!" shrieked the abbé, "is it too late?"

"Too late."

"Is he dead?"

"Dead."

The canon turned livid, and forcing his way by her, he tottered into the ante-chamber; but there, his strength failed him, and falling to the floor with his face in the dust, he uttered the heart-rending cry:

"My child! oh, my child!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNITED AT LAST!

WHEN the news that the widow of Count d'Aitignies intended to marry Pierre Wavre reached Bovilliers, there was consternation unutterable: and the baron and baroness, who had been so little affected by their daughter's despair, now indulged in the most frantic outbursts of grief. As their daughter was not near at hand, and they were consequently unable to vent their ill-humor on her, they mutually reproached each other for the disgrace that was about to befall them.

Some pretty hard words were exchanged during their conversation, and the gentleman parting from the partner of his bosom with an energetic oath, went up to his cabinet, dipped his pen in his blackest ink and wrote:

"It is not admissible for a moment, my daughter, that you should marry a Jew, however honorable and illustrious he may be. As for me, I here make my solemn and formal protest against such an act on your part.

"You are, it is true, in a position to dispense with your parents' consent, though I warn you that we shall publicly disown you if you persist in your

determination. I make this statement only out of charity to you, in order to prevent you from making any allusion to your rights, in case a forgetfulness of the proprieties should suggest such an idea to you. At all events, you must understand that such a union will be equivalent, on your part, to a rupture of all connection and association with your family. It is, therefore, for you to decide what share of affection your fancy for Monsieur Wavre permits you to still entertain for us."

Taking this for his starting point, the former frequenter of the Tuileries proceeded to enumerate the considerations that should prevent the lady from carrying her plan into execution. These considerations were of every sort and kind, and not a few of them were very singular on the part of a man with whom they had so little weight when his personal gratification was concerned.

"Ah, Louise," he continued, "ah, my child, I once more conjure you to reflect. Remember who you are, the education you have received, our connections and our alliances. Think, above all, of your mother, a Bèlencour, whom you will overwhelm with despair, and whom you will seem to brave and insult, by thus acting in defiance of her most cherished beliefs. Ask yourself, Louise, if it is fair, if you have any right to inflict such a humiliation upon her, upon the mother who has so carefully reared you and who has neither spared the best of counsels nor the best of examples

in your training. Think too, of me, and my honored position in the exclusive circles to which I belong. Will you compel me to blush for you; will you compel me to disown you as unworthy of my affection and of my name?

"Do you know what people will say?" continued the fastidious baron. "They will say that such an incongruous union can be only the result of an intimacy that existed prior to your widowhood. And what can we reply? How can we be certain, since in spite of our affection for you, a person of your rank, the daughter of a Vaconsin de Bovilliers, and the widow of Count d'Aitignies, deliberately forms the project of marrying a Jew!

"Such a thing is not to be thought of. If you have no respect for your parents, or the name they have transmitted to you, if you have no respect for yourself, at least show some deference to public opinion. Does it become you, tell me, to wound your equals by your contempt for religious laws? How dare you face the disapproval such an event can not fail to arouse?

"Have you thought of another and very important thing? Admitting that the protests of your relatives, and their absence on the day of your nuptials have no weight with you, who, I ask, will consecrate your union? To what church will you go to ask the sanction of Heaven? As you are well aware, the ministers of the true church will refuse it. Will you have the

culpable courage to renounce your faith and accept the heretical belief of your lover? But little is evidently needed to convert you to Judaism. Such a change would be only logical, and our disgrace would be complete."

Louise read her father's lengthy epistle very calmly, and when Pierre called on her that afternoon, she handed him the letter.

"What do you think of it?" she inquired when he had finished reading it.

"What do *you* think of it, Louise?"

"One point only strikes me; which is that the priests of your religion and of mine will alike refuse to solemnize our nuptials."

"Pardon me," replied the young man, "though the rabbis of my Church would, in fact, refuse to unite us, the Catholic priests are more obliging; and on consideration of a handsome fee they will consent to perform the marriage ceremony on condition that I do not cross the threshold of the sanctuary."

Louise could not help smiling; Pierre also smiled.

"Are you and I," he asked gently, "the persons to see in these expedients anything but a subterfuge? Are either of us capable of feigning sentiments that we do not possess; in other words, of playing a comedy out of an excess of condescension?"

"Certainly not."

"In that case, only one point remains: a show of deference to the feelings of your family."

"But how?"

"Distance softens the effect of acts that one disapproves, and time consecrates them. Will you consent to leave this country?"

"Gladly. Such has long been my secret wish, so intensely do I desire to escape from a society whose laws are equally revolting to my good sense and my conscience. My parents would not be horrified at any secret misconduct on my part, but would blush to see me marry a Jew; public opinion would openly censure me; the priest who would absolve me for any breach of wifely fidelity, would not consent to pronounce the divine benediction upon our union. All this is absurd. It is too evident that God cannot approve of such distinctions. Let us depart, my dearest, and seek liberty in more indulgent and wiser lands, where virtue is a reality, unrestricted by absurd dogmas which hypocrisy alone has the power to evade. Let us celebrate our nuptials in a land where it suffices to be good to deserve respect, without being obliged to give an account of one's faith. There, we can find a magistrate who will marry us as indissolubly as if the *virtuosos* of the opera sang to the accompaniment of the organ, in the presence of all the assembled Vaconsins and Bèlencours. On the day of our marriage, after its legal consecration, we will go, you to your synagogue, I to the chapel, and there repeat our prayers in the words that have been taught us. The rest matters little. The essential thing, Pierre, is

a determination to do right, to be faithful to one's duty, and accomplish one's task in life honorably and creditably. After a time, we will return to France, without troubling ourselves about the approbation of mere acquaintances. I am sure of my brother's approval and support; besides, in the society which I shall enter with you, the artistic circles which constitute the true aristocracy of the time, tolerance is a principle. No one there will ask us if our religious beliefs are identical; and provided I am a faithful and loving wife, your talent cannot fail to win me an enviable position there. I desire nothing further, Pierre, my attachment to you is my greatest joy, and I shall deem it an honor if there is ever any sacrifice I can make for your sake."

A few weeks afterward, the friends of Pierre and Louise, received, under cover of an envelope, a card, by which, in accordance with American custom, they were apprised of the marriage in the following terms:

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and
Louise Vaconsin, (Countess, Widow d'Aitignies).
Married.
New York, 187—.

THE END.

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